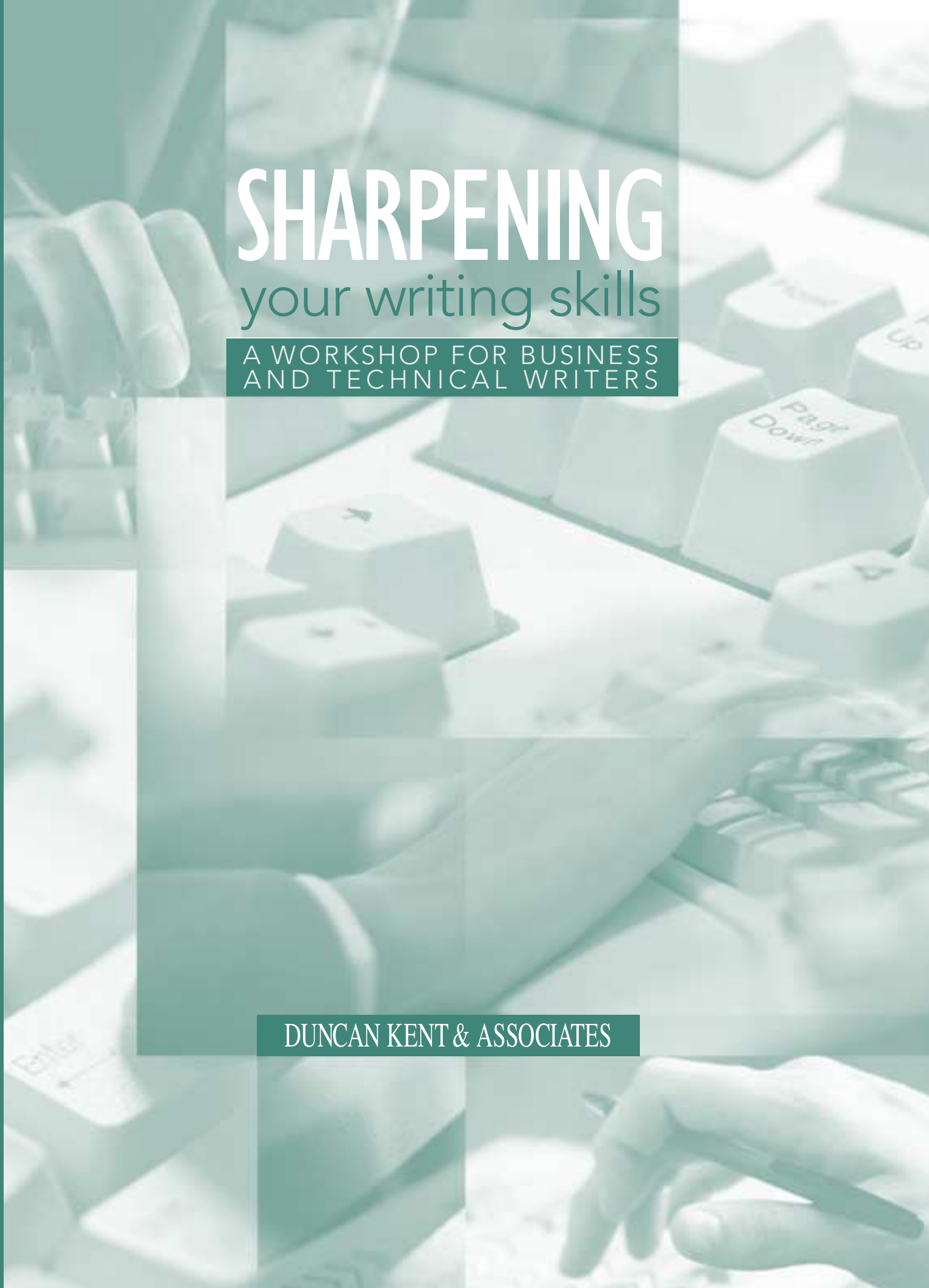

SHARPENING
your writing skills

A WORKSHOP FOR BUSINESS AND TECHNICAL WRITERS

DUNCAN KENT & ASSOCIATES

SHARPENING
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A WORKSHOP FOR BUSINESS AND TECHNICAL WRITERS

DUNCAN KENT

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Introduction

Good writing skills are essential for career success in many jobs. Are yours holding you back? This workshop is designed to dramatically improve your business writing by showing you how to communicate faster and more effectively using plain English.

Who is the workshop for?

This workshop is for you if you write reports, design documents, manuals, white papers, journal articles, or routine letters and memos, and want to get your message across quickly and clearly. If you're already a good writer, the workshop will sharpen your skills and give you valuable insights into your writing style. And you'll get a quick refresher on some of the important rules of grammar, punctuation, and usage that often cause problems for writers.

What does the workshop cover?

In this workshop you'll learn:

- what plain English is and why it's the best style for business writing
- why writing styleguides are important and the best ones to buy
- important steps in planning what you're going to write
- the things you want to know about your readers
- how to brainstorm ideas
- ways to organize your document
- strategies for writing faster and better
- ways to present information graphically
- how to write simple but powerful sentences
- the importance of choosing everyday words
- 20 rules of plain English
- where to put commas and other tricky punctuation
- how to design pages that stand out and are easy to read

In the Appendix, you'll find suggested answers to the exercises and a short business writing styleguide. You'll also find the *Dictionary of Plain English*, which lists overblown words, clichés, and overly formal phrases and their plain English equivalents.

MODULE 1
Good Business Writing Style

YOU don't need to be a genius with words or have a degree in English to be a good business writer. You just need to have good ideas, be able to figure out what your readers need to know, and be able to express yourself clearly.

At its best, business writing is simple and straightforward. It's what you write about that can be complicated. Good writers write plainly so that the meaning comes through clearly. Good writing does not draw attention to itself. Instead of "Wow, this person has a great vocabulary!" your readers should be saying "Wow, that's a great idea!" Or simply, "Yeah, I understand."

But many people have different ideas about what is good business writing. We've all been influenced by different people over our lives—our parents, our teachers, our friends, our bosses. They've all helped shape the way we write (and a lot of other things too). And we've been exposed to many different writing styles in our reading—both good and bad.

In this module, you'll learn about different writing styles—good and bad—and decide for yourself what is appropriate writing style. If you're like most people, you'll agree that it's *plain English* (also called *plain language*). And that's what this workshop is about—learning to express yourself clearly using plain English.

Over-the-top style

An aspiring writer sent me his resume with this cover letter. To get you thinking about what is good business writing style, read this letter. (Yes, this is a real letter!) His writing made a big impression on me—but probably not the way he intended. Read it and decide for yourself. Would you hire him?

Sample cover letter

Dear Mr. Kent,

Thank you for speaking with me on the phone on Friday, December 2nd, and inviting me to submit a resume to your firm. Please find it enclosed.

Let me pay you the compliment of honesty. You can see my experience is limited. But I can write. I know what makes beautiful language, and I have sewn silk purses from sows' ears. I know how to persuade, to argue, to narrate and to relate. My language is always "definite, specific and concrete," to paraphrase that venerable tome. I can maintain a sustained argument, laying out my premises in an order which is at once logical and elegant, flowing to their predetermined conclusion. I am ruthlessly self-critical, excising every word, sentence and paragraph that does not move forward or prove my thesis. In two words, my writing is "motion" and "economy."

But again, I have limited experience. My degree was an excellent start, and my military staff-writing and infrequent editorializing have proven worthwhile forays into other language venues. I now launch forward, tentatively but fearlessly, into another possibility of writing: the hired gun. I see my skills as marketable, just as marketable as butchery or blacksmithing. And just as a butcher learns skills and begins his apprenticeship, I too have learned the basics. I too am ready to apprentice.

Where I stand, you stood. The gulf between us consists of time and experience but can be bridged by your wisdom, my desire and your willingness to risk your time and some writing assignments on me. I realize I ask more than I dare, but only because you have stood here. You know the agony of waiting for that "Yes!" which I now hope to hear. Will you, sir, say "Yes"?

Sincerely,

Write down the words that best describe the writing style of this letter:

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

Legal style (legalese)

Avoid writing like a lawyer, even if you are one. No laws or rules require this hackneyed style. It may be true that certain legal language has been interpreted by the courts and has specific meanings under the law, but it has no place in most business writing.

Example

Enclosed please find our response pursuant to your inquiry of Wednesday last. We hereby advise you, as per your request, that we will be forwarding said refund in due course under separate cover. (**Legalese**)

We received your letter written last Wednesday. We agree that you are entitled to a refund and will mail it to you in a few days. (**Plain English**)

Bureaucratic style

Some people think that business writing must be passive and use big words. While on the surface this style of writing may sound impressive, it actually conveys less meaning because it's ambiguous.

Example

It has been recommended that the organization prioritize its strategic management objectives before decision options are quantified and the distribution network is regionalized. (**Bureaucratic**)

We recommend that the company decide its business objectives before trying to rate the various possible locations for its regional distribution centres. (**Plain English**)

Excessive courtesy

Avoid inauthentic expressions of friendship, courtesy, or caring. Honesty is refreshing. Most of us have heard too much of this marketing drivel to think that it's genuine.

Example

It has been a pleasure to serve you and we trust that if we can be of any additional assistance in the future you will not hesitate to call upon us. (**Excessively courteous**)

I enjoyed working with you. Call again if you need more help. (**Plain English**)

Exercise 1: Make this sentence more believable

You've reached the offices of A-to-Z Manufacturing. Unfortunately, all of our operators are busy at the moment, but please be assured that we value your business—each of our customers is very special to us. Please stay on the line and the next available operator will be right with you. Again, we value your business and look forward to serving you!

Abbreviated scientific style

Don't drop articles or other words, even in procedures. Remove unnecessary words for conciseness, but don't remove words that are essential to the meaning. This telegraphic style is simplistic, irritating, and occasionally ambiguous.

Example

When creating new file, ensure code not assigned to existing file. (**Avoid**)

When you create a new file, ensure the file name has not been assigned to another file. (**Better**)

Exercise 2: Add back the missing words

If oil pressure under 40 lb, loosen right-hand banjo screw.

Exercise 3: Top 10 list of attributes of good business writing

Prepare a list of the 10 most important features of good business writing.

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.
10.

Say it in plain English

In the last exercise, you listed the 10 most important features of good business writing. Here's a list of some of the important features of plain English. See how your list compares to this one. While *plain English* means different things to different people, there's general agreement about these features.

Plain English guidelines:

1. Write to your readers as though you were talking to them in a friendly, straightforward manner (often called *conversational* style).
2. Use the same short, everyday words that you use with friends and co-workers—avoid big fancy words.
3. Use first person ("I" or "we") or second person ("you") point of view, where appropriate—they're shorter and more direct than using the third person ("he" or "the clerk").
4. Use short sentences in normal subject-verb-object sentence order.
5. Prefer active rather than passive verbs (for example, "I wrote the report" instead of "the report was written").
6. Use strong verbs (for example, "analyze" instead of "conduct an analysis of").
7. Write concisely, removing all unnecessary or redundant words.
8. Use gender-neutral terms (for example, "firefighter" instead of "fireman").
9. Use contractions, such as "can't" and "you'll," to make your writing more conversational.
10. Avoid slang, clichés, and other bad habits of speech.

Tone

The *tone* of your writing is the feeling that it leaves with the reader and results from the choices you make as you write. Look at the list of words that describe tone. Which tones are you striving for in your writing?

Exercise 4: Writing tone

Circle the words that best describe the tone that you strive for in your business writing:

- abrasive
- aggressive
- assertive
- authoritative
- blunt
- bureaucratic
- casual
- condescending
- courteous
- demanding
- distant
- earnest
- engaging
- formal
- forthright
- friendly
- helpful
- honest
- impersonal
- informal
- insulting
- informative
- objective
- officious
- personal
- polite
- sarcastic
- silly
- sincere
- stiff
- subjective
- threatening

Guidelines for achieving a friendly, helpful tone:

- Write in the first person ("I" and "we") or second person ("you"). Avoid the third person ("he" or "the customer"), which is cold and impersonal.
- Write the way you would speak to a friend, and use the simple, everyday words that you would use in normal conversation, minus the slang and other bad habits of speech.
- Avoid long and convoluted sentences that are usually only found in writing—keep them short and to the point.
- Avoid passive sentences, which don't mention the real subject. Instead of "Your application has been reviewed…," write "We reviewed your application…"

Formality

Some documents are more formal than others. The most formal are usually legislation, legal documents, and policy statements. The least formal are usually memos, emails, and in-house training and instruction manuals. Of course, the formality of these documents will vary depending on the author, the reader, and your organization's culture. The trend over the past few decades has been towards greater informality in all but a few types of documents. Are your documents more formal than they have to be?

Styleguides and style sheets

All types of writing require you to make a variety of decisions, particularly if you're writing longer documents, such as reports, proposals, or manuals. Even the most experienced writers rely on styleguides and style sheets to help them write and format their documents consistently.

Styleguides

Organizations that prepare a lot of documents will typically either use a published styleguide or develop one of their own. Even the most experienced writers can't remember all of the rules and conventions set out in these essential reference sources. Most writers will own several for different kinds of documents. Keep your styleguide beside your dictionary, within arm's reach of where you write.

Styleguides usually cover:

- word choice
- writing style and tone
- spelling of certain words
- capitalization and hyphenation of certain words
- format and layout of documents
- process for preparing documents
- how documents should be word processed

Style sheets

Styleguides are great, as far as they go, but they won't cover important writing issues such as:

- names, capitalization, spelling, and hyphenation of terms specific to your industry, organization, or product
- formatting standards and guidelines for your documents
- your organization's process for researching, writing, editing, reviewing, and approving publications
- anything else not covered in the styleguide you use

This is where style sheets come in. They're the place where you record the day-to-day decisions you make about your documents. Without them, you'd have to remember all of the decisions you make. And if you have several people working on the same document, style sheets are essential. Often, a style sheet is just a sheet or two of paper pinned to the bulletin board and added to as you encounter issues and make decisions.

Some good styleguides:

A Canadian Writer's Reference, Diana Hacker, ISBN 0-17-604211-3. Not just a great styleguide of Canadian English, but a book of essential grammar focusing on typical problem areas, with lots of examples.

Editing Canadian English, Freelance Editors' Association of Canada. ISBN 0-88894-624-4. A relatively compact (about 200 pages) book prepared by and for professional editors working in book publishing and other industries, focusing on the problems that Canadian editors face.

Microsoft Manual of Style for Technical Publications, Microsoft Press, ISBN 1-57231-890-2. Microsoft's own internal styleguide for its software manuals. Microsoft has set the industry standard for Windows-based software, and this guide sets the standard for technical publications. A must-have for all manual writers.

Read Me First! - A Style Guide for the Computer Industry, Sun Technical Publications, ISBN 0-13-455347-0. Originally the in-house styleguide for technical publications at Sun Microsystems. Now, one of the best-known styleguides for writers of end-user manuals for the software industry.

Science and Technical Writing - A Manual of Style, Philip Rubens, ISBN 0-415-92551-7. A modern reference of North American conventions that focuses on scientific and technical writing—a must for engineers who write, and all writers of technical manuals and reports.

Style Guide for Business and Technical Communication, Franklin Covey. ISBN 0-9652481-1-9. A comprehensive styleguide intended for the general business writer—one of the best general styleguides around.

The Canadian Press Stylebook, The Canadian Press, ISBN 0-920009-10-7. The styleguide used by many Canadian journalists. These are the conventions used in most of our papers and magazines, so are the ones most familiar to the general public.

The Chicago Manual of Style, Editorial staff of the University of Chicago, ISBN 0-226-10390-0. One of the best-known, most respected and, at over 700 pages, most comprehensive styleguides around—a definitive reference focusing on book and academic publishing.

The Elements of Style, Strunk and White, ISBN 0-20530902X. One of the oldest and best-known styleguides, and a model of the style that it preaches—it belongs on every writer's shelf.

Words into Type, Marjorie Skillin, ISBN 0-13-964262-5. A classic, comprehensive reference source covering the fine points of grammar, usage, style, and production methods. Last updated in 1974, but it stands the test of time.

MODULE 2

Planning to Write

A lot of writers just start writing without a lot of thought about where they're going. For short documents, like emails and memos, this isn't usually a problem. But for longer documents, such as short reports or proposals, or worse, for manuals or long reports, the lack of a plan can force you to make major revisions to your document once it's been drafted. Not only is this more time consuming, but often the end result suffers.

Planning begins with asking questions about the purpose, objectives, and intended readers of your publication. Why am I writing this document? Who's going to read it and what information do they need? It's important to know the answers to these questions before you get started.

All writers, from time to time, suffer from writer's block—an inability to make significant progress with their writing task. Some writers just give up, hoping it'll be better the next day. Business writers, however, usually don't have that option—they've got to produce, because their job depends on it! Fortunately, there are time-tested techniques for making sure this doesn't happen to you—techniques like clustering and outlining.

In this module, you'll learn how to plan your document, and why the more you know about your readers, the better off you'll be. You'll also learn some techniques for generating and organizing ideas, and how to turn those ideas into a first draft—quickly.

Decide on your purpose

The first step in writing well is to ask yourself why you're writing. In business writing, we seldom write for the sheer joy of it—we usually have a specific purpose. We've got a reason behind our need to communicate something.

Explicit purposes

Consider the typical reasons why you write. Without a clearly defined reason for writing, it's difficult to write anything. How will you know what information to include or how much detail is needed? And it's not only important to clarify the purpose in your own mind, but also to make sure that your boss and others involved in the document agree.

Examples of explicit purposes:

- report a solution to a problem
- describe services available to customers
- interpret lab results
- provide instructions
- ask for permission
- initiate a new procedure
- order material
- change a course of action
- submit a bid
- ask for a proposal
- define a position on policy
- propose adoption of a plan
- thank a customer
- congratulate an employee
- announce a change

Implicit purposes

But writing can also have more subtle purposes that are more felt than expressed. These are sometimes referred to as *implicit* purposes. Most business writers will recognize some of these underlying purposes—they are a normal part of business communications. Can you relate to any of these purposes?

Examples of implicit purposes:

- to generate trust
- to persuade
- to deflect blame
- to establish your professional credibility
- to demonstrate your objectivity
- to generate business

Decide on your objectives

Sometimes business documents will have objectives—there's something specific that you want to happen. If your document has specific objectives, write them down. Once you've finished, you can go back and see whether the document achieved its objectives or not. Establishing specific objectives is one of the ways we use to measure the success of our documents.

Examples of specific objectives:

- be awarded a contract (for proposals)
- get a job interview (for a resume and cover letter)
- allow people to complete a task successfully without help (a procedure)
- allow a technician to diagnose and repair a piece of equipment within a limited period of time (a repair manual)
- allow people to find something they're looking for (a set of directions)

Warning Label Jamboree: text found on actual warning labels

On the bottom of a box of Tesco's Tirimisu Dessert:	"Do not turn upside down."
On a Korean kitchen knife:	"Warning — Keep out of children."
On a Japanese food processor:	"Not to be used for the other use."
On Sainsbury's Peanuts:	"Warning: contains nuts."
On a Swedish chainsaw:	"Do not attempt to stop chain with your hands."
On Marks & Spencer Bread Pudding:	"Product will be hot after heating."

Understand your readers

Knowing your readers—your *audience*—is essential to writing well. Different audiences need different information. Identify precisely who you are writing to. If it's someone you know well, it's easy. If it's a single group of people (such as technicians), it may be a little harder. If you have a variety of different readers of your document, you have a challenge!

Find out as much as you can about your audience. If you can, go and meet them or give them a call. Find out who they are, what their interests are, what makes them tick. Follow them around until you understand their information needs—then write your document. This is often referred to as *user-focused* documentation, and is essential to effective business writing.

Exercise 5: Identify and profile your audience

Think about the various kinds of documents that you write and the people who read them. List 10 things you'd like to know about your readers.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Reading at work

Reading for work is different than reading for pleasure. When reading for pleasure, you usually start at the beginning, read carefully to savour the language, and read straight through to the end.

When you read to learn, such as reading a course textbook, you usually start at the beginning and read progressively through the book, even re-reading if you don't understand it. And you typically don't go on to the next section until you've mastered the previous one, since the later sections are often based on the earlier ones.

Not so for most business documents—particularly longer ones, like big reports and manuals. Very few readers will start at the beginning, and very few will read them cover to cover. Most will skim and scan through them, looking for topics of interest. For manuals, they're usually looking for information to solve a problem, answer a question, or complete a task.

Even for shorter documents, few people have the time to read them thoroughly. Think about all the things that you haven't read yet. How do you read business documents? Don't ignore this difference in reading styles—design your documents to make it easier for skimmers and scanners.

Techniques to help skimmers and scanners:

- Organize related information together in the same place (referred to as organizing *topically*).
- Divide the text into logical chunks (sometimes called *chunking*).
- Label each topic with a descriptive heading (up to three headings per page).
- Create a table of contents, and if the document is more than 50 pages, an alphabetical index as well.
- Use presentation techniques, such as bullet lists, numbered steps, tables, and diagrams, to communicate information more easily.
- Highlight key words and ideas.

Clustering

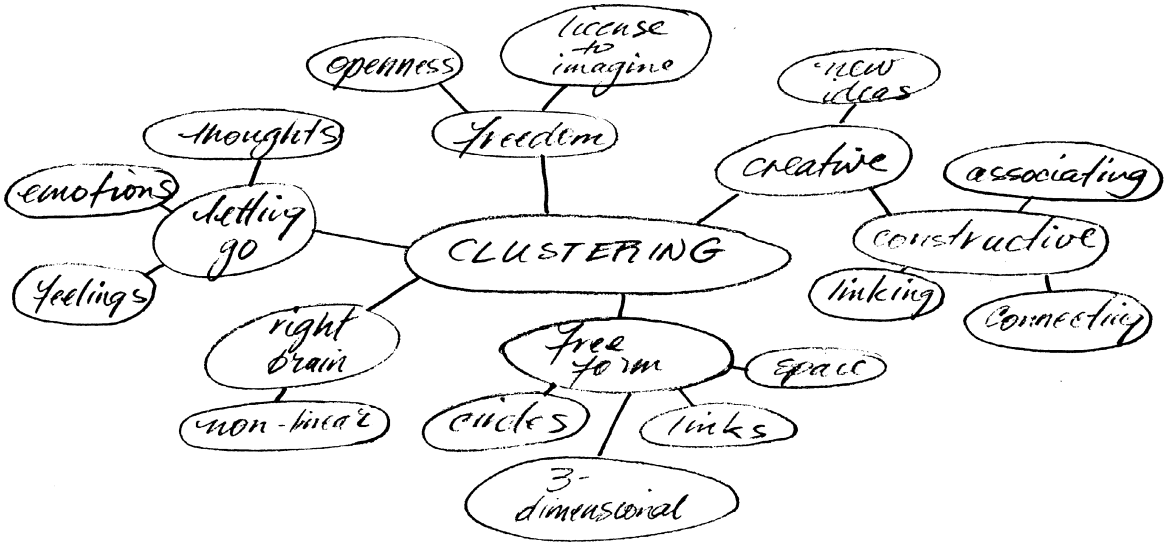
Clustering (sometimes called *mind mapping*) is a long-practiced technique for generating ideas. Many writers find it valuable during the early stages of planning as a stepping stone to a first draft. It can help you identify the topics for your document and think about the best way to organize them.

Start with a clean sheet of paper. Write the topic that you need to write about in the centre and draw a circle around it. Now sit back and focus on the topic. You may want to close your door and put your phone on call forward. When an idea occurs to you, don't be critical—write it down, draw a circle around it, and link it to the centre word.

After a while, if you're like most people, you'll have jotted down lots of ideas. Keep going until you can't think of anything else. Now you can sit back and look objectively at your ideas, sorting them out and thinking about how they could be organized. Before, those ideas were drifting around in your head. Now they're down on the page where you can evaluate them.

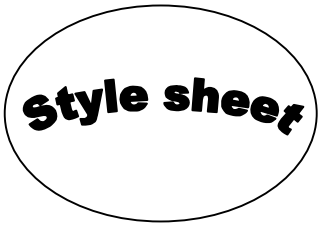
Of course, it would be difficult to write using your cluster diagram at this point, because the ideas aren't organized yet. The next steps are to decide on the document hierarchy (sections and subsections, if appropriate) and the sequence of topics (what goes first, what goes next). Then you'll be ready to write.

Try creating a cluster diagram and see if it works for you. Most people find that it's worth the few minutes that it takes to create one.



Exercise 6: Create a cluster diagram for a personal style sheet

Imagine that you do a lot of business writing and want to prepare your own personal style sheet of conventions and standards that will apply to the documents you typically write. See how many possible topics you can identify that might be part of your personal style sheet. If you're unsure of what style sheets are, go back to page 10 on style sheets. Give yourself seven minutes.



Organize your ideas

Before you can write, you must decide the order of the topics. While clustering can help identify topics that need to be included, it won't tell you how to organize them.

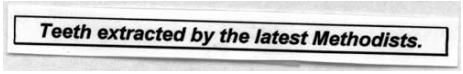
To decide the best method of organization, consider the following:

- How will the information be used (read thoroughly or used as reference)?
- How is this type of information usually organized?
- How do my readers expect me to organize this information?
- How will my readers use this information (for example, to complete a task)?
- Are readers already familiar with this information or does it need to be carefully introduced and explained?
- What is the logical relationship between different parts of the information?

And just because one part of your document is organized a certain way, doesn't mean it all has to be. One section could be organized top down to explain things easily, while the following sections could be organized topically, or even alphabetically for easy reference.

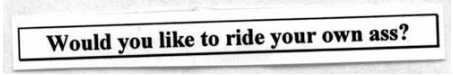
Signs and Notices From Around the World:

Hong Kong Dentist

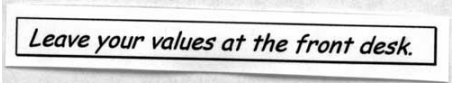


Hong Kong Tailor

Thai Donkey Ride



Paris Hotel



Organize your document

Alphabetical

Sometimes it's best to organize information topically, provide a keyword heading, then sequence the headings alphabetically—just the way I've organized this section. This allows readers to find information quickly, which is why many reference manuals are organized alphabetically. Of course, if you only have a few headings, it's not much of an advantage since readers can scan all of the headings quickly. But alphabetically organizing information prevents any logical progression from one heading to the next, so it's a poor way to explain things.

Bottom up

The results of scientific experiments, lab tests, or anything done by objective analysis are usually presented *bottom up*—that is, the details are presented first, and broad conclusions or general statements are presented last. This reflects one of the principles of scientific work that we should not begin our evaluations with foredrawn conclusions. Investigation reports, feasibility studies, and analytical reports are usually organized bottom up—findings first, conclusions last.

One problem, however, with putting your conclusions last is that the end of your documents, particularly longer ones, is often more poorly read than the beginning. So to make sure that even your busiest readers see the conclusions, repeat them at the front in an *executive summary*.

Chronological

If the sequence of events is the most important aspect of the information, then organize it chronologically—in the order that events occurred or steps need to be done. Most documents that describe past events, such as investigative reports, are organized chronologically. Procedure manuals and other instructional documents also organize information chronologically, because procedure steps usually have to done in a set order.

Most important to least important

Imagine receiving a letter that begins with trivial matters and concludes, almost as an afterthought, with something important. For short documents, like letters, memos, and emails, you'll want to begin with the most important topic first—to get straight to the main point. Then, in the space remaining, you can address related but secondary issues.

Random

Sometimes there isn't a good reason to organize information in a particular way. In this case, organize it randomly. The most common form of randomly organized information is the bullet list. Other than bullet lists, information is seldom organized randomly.

Top down

Descriptive information and introductions to new topics are usually organized *top down*—that is, they begin with broad, general statements and finish with the details (describing the forest before describing the trees). Use this method when you want to introduce a new topic, explain a process, or persuade the reader about something. Your high school essays were probably organized top down if they began with a general introduction (your *thesis*), then moved into the details (your arguments). Paragraphs are organized top down if they begin with a topic sentence, which describes the general content of the paragraph, followed by specific details.

Topical

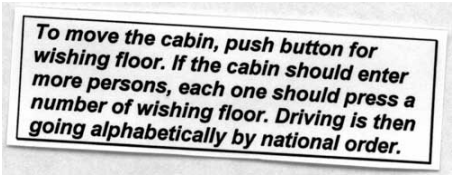
When you write, you may want to group related information together under headings that describe the topic. Organizing information topically ensures that your reader will find all related information together in the same place, rather than scattered throughout the document. As the author, you decide what the topical groupings are, but they should make sense to your readers. Other methods of organization can also apply to information that is grouped topically, because you'll have to decide the appropriate sequence for the topical groupings.

Signs and Notices From Around the World:

Tokyo Car Rental Brochure

When passenger on foot heave into sight, tootle the horn. Trumpet him melodiously at first, but if he still obstacles your passage then tootle him with vigor.

Belgrade Hotel Elevator


To move the cabin, push button for wishing floor. If the cabin should enter more persons, each one should press a number of wishing floor. Driving is then going alphabetically by national order.

Outline before you write

Once you've identified the topics you need to cover and decided the best way to organize them, then you may want to prepare an *outline*. An outline is a preliminary table of contents that will serve as a road map as you write. It lists the sections of the document in the order you intend to present them.

For short documents, such as letters, memos, and emails, the outline may be only a few words. For slightly longer documents, such as short reports, proposals, and papers, it may also include subsections (two levels). For long documents, such as manuals and long reports, it may include sub-subsections as well (three levels). Match the level of the outline to the complexity and length of the document.

Outlining is a technique that many professional writers use. Not only will it guide your writing, but you can also review it with others interested in the document before you get started to make sure they agree with the topics you're planning to cover and how you're going to organize them.

For short documents, identify sections. For slightly longer documents, identify subsections as well. For long documents, consider outlining the sub-subsections.

Example of a document outline

Here's the outline for the first two modules of this workshop:

Module 1 Good Business Writing

- Over-the-top style
- Legal style (legalese)
- Bureaucratic style
- Abbreviated scientific style
- Say it in plain English
- Tone
- Styleguides and style sheets

Module 2 Plan to Write

- Decide your purpose
- Decide your objectives
- Understand your readers
- Reading at work
- Clustering
- Organize your ideas
- Organize your document
- Outline before you write

BAD WRITING CONTEST

We are searching for the worst examples of business and technical writing. Send in your favorite example of wordiness or doubletalk. A new contest starts with each newsletter. The prizes are:

First Prize: $100 cash
Second Prize: $50 cash
Third Prize: $25 cash

As the number of submissions grows, the job of picking the worst examples becomes more difficult. We only wish we had room to print more.

Unfortunately, some of the worst submissions aren't submissions. We continue to receive them as part of our regular mail. This can lead to some embarrassing situations. For example, we received a sure winner in the form of an affidavit from a person working for a major city government. There was no cover letter, just a note with the person's name on it. So we assumed it was a bad writing contest entry and sent out our normal acknowledgement letter. It turns out the person wanted us to sign the affidavit and return it. Sorry about that.

THIS ISSUE'S WINNERS

FIRST PRIZE - $100.00

First prize goes to Donald L. Redmond. This entry received extra points because Mr. Redmond admitted it was his own letter written early in his career. (Most people send letters written by their boss.) According to Mr. Redmond, he did not know how to answer the question and so wrote the following:

"Due to ____ Company's integrated organizational mobility we should, through our functional policy programming, be able to provide compatible third-generation hardware for increased loading. However, with our responsive management concept, we may desire other systemized monitored options or, possibly, balanced digital capability. In turn, it would then be necessary to utilize the total reciprocal flexibility which is essential to logistical compatibility."

SECOND PRIZE - $50.00

Many entries come from user manuals and instruction books. Some of them are simply unintelligible. Others appear simple but are a little hard to follow. Take, for example, our second prize entry from Joseph Christie:

APPENDIX B: A WORD OF CAUTION

"The DOWN button, when depressed, will remain DOWN but will not stay UP unless the UP button has been pressed DOWN.

The UP button, on the other hand, will not remain DOWN and returns UP when pressed DOWN.

Should the UP button stick DOWN, pressing the DOWN button DOWN may possibly cause the UP button to release from DOWN and return UP.

If a situation exists in which both the UP and DOWN buttons are neither UP nor DOWN but the UP button is halfway DOWN and the DOWN button is halfway UP, then pressing the UP button will cause both the UP and DOWN buttons to come UP.""

This appendix continues for several more paragraphs in the same vein. All instances of the words "up" and "down" throughout the appendix are capitalized, adding to the confusion. Personally, we would love to hear someone explaining this to a training seminar.

THIRD PRIZE - $25.00

Resumes are another rich area for entries. We've been tempted to run a contest to find a resume which uses the word "use." Try it, you'll find it's always "utilize." Our third place entry from Barbara Stafford goes beyond the normal doubletalk and into the metaphysical:

OBJECTIVE: I desire a responsible, innovative position as an Electronic Engineering Technician in which my abilities are utilized fully and effectively; with opportunities for growth and space for life - to interject my visions when appropriate and when actualization is possible. Consequently, my desire for fascination can be endlessly fulfilled within any field; as long as temporal limitations are not placed upon it. I humbly feel my assets would be a worthy addition to your ardent firm.

Thanks again to our prize winners, and to all our entrants.

RULES:

1. All entries must be original, non-proprietary, and non-copyrighted. Entries become the property of RightSoft, Inc. RightSoft retains the right to use any entries in promotional and product literature.

2. Entries not received by the press date for a newsletter will automatically be entered into the contest for the next newsletter.

3. Entries will be judged on the basis of verbosity and likelihood of occurrence. All entries must have actually been used in real life.

4. Entries may be of any length from a single phrase to a multiple page document. We will print only excerpts from longer passages.

5. You may enter as many times as you wish.

6. No purchase is necessary to win.

7. Entries may not be obscene or vulgar.

8. Please include your entire name. We hate to refer to people by their initials. Tell us uf you do not want your name published.

MODULE 3

Writing Strategies

MOST writers, even professionals, can't write perfect, polished prose on the first go-through. Maybe like you, they find themselves struggling, having to go back through their draft several times before they get it right. In fact, most writers will go through their draft at least three times before they're happy.

Writing is a process of rewriting, rewriting, and rewriting.

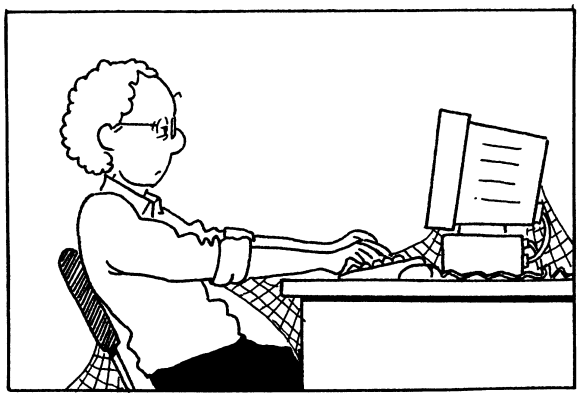
The strategies that you use can be critical to the quality of your writing. This module gives you some strategies to help produce well-written drafts quickly. These are the same strategies used by professional writers—people who have to write well everyday.

Some indications your writing process is flawed:

- Writing is a constant struggle—nothing comes out easily and you don't enjoy it.
- You often have to go back and reorganize your work.
- Other people always want to change what you've written.
- You often make embarrassing mistakes that you should have caught.
- It takes you too long to write.

Write faster and better

Some people struggle over every word, while others write quickly with little apparent effort. Here are some tips to help you be a more productive writer.



Tip 1: Prepare an outline

To write well, you need to know where you're going. Your outline (see page 23) is your map. Without one, you're lost.

Tip 2: Write, *then* edit

Don't try to write and edit simultaneously—these tasks should be done on different passes. If you're constantly going back to make changes or correct errors, you're editing as you go, which can be disruptive to your writing. Many writers find that it's better and faster to write first, without trying to make it perfect, then go back later to edit. That way you won't keep derailing your train of thought.

Tip 3: Write, revise, and edit

Plan to go through your document three times before it's ready. The first pass is to draft it. Research and gather the information you need, then get started. Many writers find that they write best when they write fast, so don't worry about making your document perfect—you can clean it up later.

The second pass is to revise your document. Focus on the big problems—poor organization, missing or incorrect information, problems of clarity, and significant style faults. You may want to rewrite sections or reorganize information.

On the third pass, pay careful attention to grammar, writing style, usage, and punctuation. If all goes well, this should be your final pass.

Tip 4: Give yourself a day or two between rewrites

You may find that it's difficult to edit something that you've just written. This relates to your short-term memory. If you try to edit immediately after writing, you've still got all that information circling around in your head. But if you give it a day or two, you'll have lost much of that short-term memory, and you'll find it easier to revise and edit.

Tip 5: Read out loud

When you're close to finished, read your document out loud and listen to it. Your ear will tell you if problems remain. It's also a great way of telling whether it's conversational or not.

Design a hierarchy

If you're writing a letter, memo, or email, it won't have a hierarchy. Even if it has headings (which is okay if it runs longer than a page or two), the headings will simply identify the main sections—you won't need subsections.

If you're writing a longer document, however, it will likely have a hierarchy—that is, you'll probably divide it into sections and subsections, and maybe even sub-subsections. Without a hierarchy, readers will find it difficult to form a clear mental model of the document, and will take longer to find information. A clear and logical hierarchy is essential for all kinds of longer business documents.

Don't be tempted to create more complicated hierarchies—most professionally prepared documents seldom go deeper than three or four levels. Any deeper and you'll start to confuse the reader.

To make the heading hierarchy apparent to the reader, you'll want to make the section headings look different than the subsection and sub-subsection headings. Readers should be able to tell at a glance the level of the heading by its typographic attributes. Headings should be formatted using your word processor's *styles* feature.

Heading hierarchy

Heading 1

Heading 2

Heading 3

Rules for logical heading hierarchies:

- Avoid single headings within a section—always have two or more headings.
- Avoid having one heading follow another without any intervening text.
- Don't skip levels (don't have a Heading 1 followed by a Heading 3).

Paragraph frequently

Paragraphing visually organizes related information together. This is one of the ways writers *chunk* information. When you move to the next topic, start a new paragraph.

The average number of sentences in a paragraph in a business document is only three or four. Avoid long paragraphs—they intimidate readers. And never have an entire page consisting of one paragraph. If you want to break up a paragraph, read it through carefully, looking for a change in the topic. You may have to move a sentence or two.

Begin each paragraph with a topic sentence. Place the most general sentence first, then go into the details—most paragraphs have a top-down structure.

It's okay to let paragraphs break across pages—just avoid single lines at the top or bottom of the page.

Exercise 7: Break up this long paragraph

Limit paragraphs to a single topic or idea. If you find yourself covering several topics, you probably need several paragraphs. It's better to have too many paragraphs than too few. Don't let paragraphs get too long. Most professional writers will average only three or four sentences in a paragraph. Ones that span large areas of the page intimidate readers. Make sure that the opening sentence introduces or summarizes the content of the paragraph. This type of opening sentence is often referred to as the *topic sentence.* The sentences that follow should flow from the first sentence and provide supporting details. Organize paragraphs into a logical sequence. This sequence might be broadest to narrowest, most important to least important, or chronological, depending on the nature of the information. If appropriate, replace paragraphs with bullet lists—they're easier for readers to scan. Avoid including more than three list items in a paragraph. If the items are steps in a procedure, use numbers instead.

Use informative headings

Headings tell readers about the information that follows. Particularly for readers who are skimming and scanning for information, having lots of descriptive headings is important.

Use topical headings – Use headings that describe the topic, not the type of information. If the section relates to a task, use the *-ing* form of the word (for example, "Printing Your Document").

Use lots of headings – Aim for two or three headings on each page. It's usually better to have too many headings than too few. If you've got a page without any headings, go back and see if you could insert some headings to group and identify the paragraphs. You may have to move paragraphs around. The only exception might be letters, memos, or emails that are a page or two long.

Keep headings short – Limit the number of words in a heading to four or five if possible. Longer headings, particularly ones that wrap onto a second line, are difficult to scan quickly.

Avoid numbering headings – Authors will sometimes number headings to make their place in the document hierarchy more apparent (for example, "6.2, Timing of Reorganization"). This is only appropriate when it's important to be able to refer to specific sections exactly, such as in specifications or standards documents.

Make headings parallel – Construct similar headings in a similar way. For example, if one heading starts with an imperative verb, then make them all start with an imperative verb (that's the way these headings are written).

Capitalize appropriately – Decide how you'll capitalize headings, then do it consistently. You can use the journalism convention of capitalizing only the first word (the way most headings are capitalized in this book), or you can capitalize all of the major words, except articles (such as "the ") and short prepositions (such as "on," "in," and "by").

Headings to avoid

Avoid headings that describe the type of information rather than the topic, such as:

- Overview
- General
- More Information
- Discussion
- Results
- Basics
- Advanced Features
- Miscellaneous
- Policies
- Procedures
- Standards
- Guidelines
- Conclusions
- Reference

Present information graphically

Different types of information lend themselves to different methods of presentation. Don't automatically write paragraph after paragraph. Most people prefer graphic information instead of written information. Look at your own preferences. Would you rather look at a picture or read paragraphs of text? Would you rather read a paragraph or scan a bullet list?

Graphic information is usually:

- less intimidating to the reader
- easier to scan to find information
- easier to understand and act on

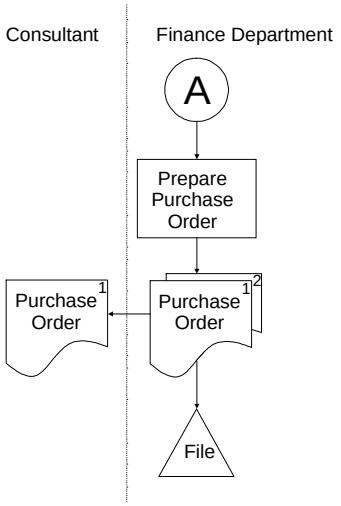
Use photographs to show readers what things look like.

As you're drafting, decide which parts of the information would be better presented as a graphic. If you decide that a bullet list, table, or numbered procedure would be better, you can probably create these yourself. If it's a graphic or icon, you might be able to use clip-art. If it's a technical illustration or photograph, however, you may need some help.

Think of yourself as a communicator, not a writer.

Ways to present information:

- bullet lists
- checklists
- text boxes
- sidebar text (words pulled out into a wide margin)
- tables
- numbered lists (usually a procedure)
- flow diagrams
- decision trees
- form or screen illustrations
- clip art
- graphics
- warnings, cautions, and notes
- photographs



Use flow diagrams to outline a process.

Edit for clarity

Editing is carefully reviewing a document to verify that it meets appropriate language, usage, and formatting standards. While you can edit your own work, it's usually better to have someone else do it—we are often blind to our own errors. Many business writers have an arrangement with another person to edit each other's writing.

The longer and more complex the document, the more important and more structured editing should become. Editing someone's letter may take only a minute or two; editing their manual could take weeks.

Things to check:

- completeness and accuracy
- appropriate organization of information
- information presented graphically where appropriate
- consistent point of view and writing style
- text written in plain English
- clear and descriptive headings
- correct spelling and grammar
- accurate page references (such as table of contents and cross-references)
- appropriate conventions for numbers and units of measure
- consistency throughout
- conciseness, with redundant and unnecessary words removed
- proper formatting and word processing

Tips:

- Don't try to catch everything on one pass. Go through several times, looking for different things each time.
- Once you notice a problem, look specifically for that problem elsewhere.
- Use, but don't rely on, computerized spelling and style checkers.
- Don't edit exclusively on the screen—some problems are easier to spot in print.

Editing etiquette:

- Offer constructive suggestions—don't criticize.
- Suggest changes where possible—don't just say "this is wrong."
- Only change errors or things that can be improved—don't simply substitute your wording. Have a reason for every change.
- Point out positive aspects of the writing too (Gee, I really liked the introduction!).
- When you're being edited, don't take offence and challenge the editor.

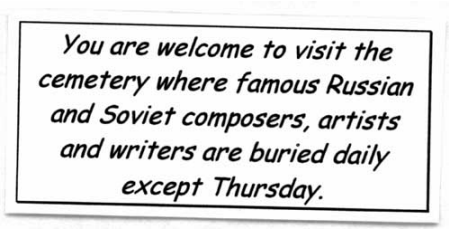
Exercise 8: Editing challenge

Can you find the 12 errors in the following paragraph?

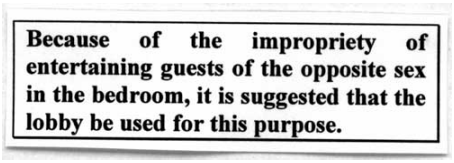
If you don't have a professsional editor available, you're best writer will have to due. Or consider contracting the services of a professional editor—their services can we worth their wait in gold. Writer's should not edit their own writing, because they are often blind to their own erros. After an edit, the editor and writer should review the changes together. This will help the writer understand reasons behind the changes. A styleguide should be use to sort out differences of opinion

Signs and Notices From Around the World:

Moscow Hotel (across from a monestary)

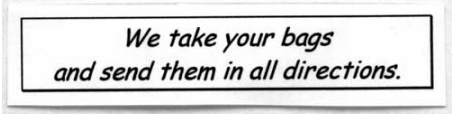

You are welcome to visit the cemetery where famous Russian and Soviet composers, artists and writers are buried daily except Thursday.

Zurich Hotel


Because of the impropriety of entertaining guests of the opposite sex in the bedroom, it is suggested that the lobby be used for this purpose.

Yugoslav Hotel

Copenhagen Airline Ticket Office



Review and approvals

Most business writing is *collaborative*—that is, you work with others to prepare, review, and approve your documents. Having other people review, edit, and approve your work is part of the normal writing process in business.

For letters, memos, and other short documents, reviews and approvals may be quick and simple. But for longer documents, such as long reports and manuals, the technical review and approval process must be carefully planned to ensure that it's thorough and doesn't delay completion of the document.

Review options

Think about the pros and cons of these different approaches:

- Send reviewers a print copy to mark up and return.
- Give reviewers access to the word processor file and let them make their changes themselves.
- Invite reviewers to a meeting to discuss their comments on the draft.
- Invite reviewers to a meeting to introduce the draft and carefully walk them through the contents.

Tips for successful reviews:

- limit the number of reviewers
- provide reviewers with clear instructions
- give reviewers a reasonable deadline
- follow up to ensure reviews are done
- keep the size of the document small (large documents are seldom reviewed carefully)

Longer documents should probably go through at least three rounds of reviews before they're finalized:

- initial technical review with primary subject experts
- section-by-section general review with stakeholders
- final review of completed document with key staff

Plain talker helps unclutter Indian English

By Stephen Ward
The Independent

LONDON — Britain left behind steam railways, architecture and a constitution when its rule in India ended half a century ago. A British emissary has just arrived in Madras to help clear up another, unwanted legacy from the Raj — convoluted, colonial language.

Martin Cutts, who runs the Plain Language Commission, a pressure group campaigning for clearer English, was invited by the Federation of Consumer Organizations of Tamil Nadu to clarify the wordy archaisms of English as it is still written in the Subcontinent.

Cutts, 41, went on a preparatory visit last year and collected examples from B.K. Anantharaman, general manager of the Madras telephone company. Company documents refer to "telephonic messages" rather than "phone calls." And instead of saying reminders will go out three weeks after phone bills, they state: "Notice regarding the intimation of outstanding bills will be issued by the third week of the issue of bills by registered post."

The company adds that: "Such of those subscribers who do not, however, wish to avail of this 'timely registered reminder service' can also give any alternative telephone No. to which reminder could be given."

Cutts, who has been spreading the gospel of plain English for 15 years, will talk to groups of lawyers, scientists, engineers and businessmen. "I will tell them to be careful to avoid guff, to shorten sentences as much as is practical, and to speak in an active voice.

"They all know their grammar, I found." In England, by contrast, he says he always has to spend about an hour explaining that an "active voice" means saying "I tell you" rather than "you are being told by me". But while they may all know what he means by active voice, it isn't always reflected in what they say — witness the insurance policy sales spiel which reads: "You won't even feel that you are paying the premiums — the pinch is not felt."

That at least is comprehensible. Others are impenetrable. The annual report of a Madras finance company to its shareholders, telling them the business is good at what it does and expects another profitable year, expresses itself thus: "With the specialised business of consumer durable credit, which is the main line of business of the company and the rich experience already gained coupled with an acceptable position in the various segments of the market, your directors are hopeful, barring unforseen circumstances, to maintaining the trend both in performance and profits."

He expects to spend much time reminding his audiences to be aware that English is a second language for their readers. "There is a tendency, I've noticed, particularly among the lawyers, to use words such as expediting, commencing and furnish, which are archaic and not easy to understand even in a first language."

Cutts and the British Council, which has sent him, are sensitive to the accusation that they represent a new imperialism imposing standard English on the Indians. Jane Moyo of the British Council in London explained that American English, Australian English or Indian English were all dynamic and acceptable, but the request to help write more explicably had come from the exasperated Indian consumer organisations.

The apostle of plain English makes the same point by quoting another passage from the life insurance policy, which runs: "Your employer deducts from your salary the amount of premiums and remits the same to us every month — no botheration to remember even!"

His view? "If botheration is plain Indian English, so be it."

MODULE 4

Words and Sentences

WHILE different people define *plain English* in different ways, most writers agree that two key aspects are the use of plain, everyday words and short sentences, preferably in normal subject-verb-object order.

In business writing you're usually trying to communicate and not to impress, so you should avoid the more complicated words and sentence structures that are available in English. Back in high school, you may have been encouraged to demonstrate your growing vocabulary and mastery of sentence syntax in your writing. Doing this correctly would usually improve your mark, and maybe your final grade. In business writing, however, your goal is almost always to communicate quickly and clearly to a broad range of readers—and sometimes to people whose first language is not English.

In this module, you'll learn about the importance of word choice and sentence length to communicating clearly. You'll also learn about the fog index, a formula that you can use to measure the clarity of a sample of writing based solely on word choice and sentence length.

What's the fog index?

The fog index was developed years ago as a way to quickly evaluate the clarity of a sample of writing. While it only measures word choice and sentence length, the results are worth considering because these two aspects of writing are widely considered to be good indicators of writing quality.

One of the reasons for the popularity of this formula is that the resulting number equates to the minimum grade-school reading level required to read the writing easily. In other words, if the result is 12, it means that you have to be reading at a grade 12 level to read it easily.

Some people believe strongly in the fog index and have used it to measure the clarity of different types of documents, including popular magazines. One comprehensive study tried the formula on a variety of popular magazines (see results below).

Fog index of various magazines

Fog Index	Reading Level	Magazine
17	Graduate studies	Very few popular magazines are this difficult
16	Fourth-year university	
15	Third-year university	
14	Second-year university	
13	First-year university	
12	Grade 12	*Atlantic*, *Harper*, *Fortune*
11	Grade 11	
10	General public is considered to read in this range	*Time*, *Newsweek*
9		*Reader's Digest*
8		Tabloids

Fog index calculation

Here's the formula for calculating the fog index for a sample of writing. It can be used on any sample of writing of any length. A few typical paragraphs are usually enough. Review the formula, then try it on the writing samples.

1. Divide the total number of words by the total number of sentences to determine the average number of words in a sentence.

2. Calculate the percentage of words with three or more syllables (the *hard* words). Don't count:
   - capitalized words
   - combinations of small words
   - verb forms, such as "created"
   - technical words

3. Add the average number of words in a sentence to the percentage of hard words. Treat the percentage as a whole number (for example, if it's 14%, add 14).

4. Multiply by 0.4.

Formula

(A + P) x 0.4 = fog index

A = Average words in a sentence
P = Percentage of hard words

A:		____	Average number of words in a sentence
P:	+	____	Percentage of hard words
	=	____	
	x	0.4	
	=	____	

Exercise 9: Calculate the fog index

Sample 1

During the study, information on the Pops Rivet operation and certain aspects of the fastener market was gathered and processed with a view of giving detailed consideration to those aspects most closely related to the needs of a sales compensation plan. The company sales pattern (both historically and current) was analyzed and summarized. A field survey relating to blind rivet application, company policies and personnel, including some general observations, was then conducted. Statistics on the total fastener market were collected. A study was made of the industry compensation scale for salesmen comparable in abilities and background to present Pops salesmen.

(100 words)

Sample 2

During our study, we considered the needs of a sales compensation plan at Pops Rivets. We studied both the Company and the total fastener market. Within the Company, we examined policies, personnel, and sales patterns—both past and present. We surveyed the fastener market, gathered statistics and looked into the application of blind rivets. We also inquired into compensation scales in companies comparable to the Pops operation.

(67 words)

Writing points of view

You can choose from three different points of view in your writing: first person, second person, and third person.

First person ("I" and "we")

Write reports and correspondence in either first person singular ("I") or plural ("we"). Maybe you were told at some point to avoid using yourself as the subject—that this wasn't objective. Much routine business writing is now written in the first person. It's straightforward, shorter, and lets the reader know who performed the action. Don't avoid first-person writing.

Example

The situation has been reviewed and the following problems have been found. (**Passive, longer**)

I have reviewed the situation and found the following problems. (**First person, shorter**)

Second person ("you")

Write instructions in the second person ("you"). Many people avoid addressing the reader as *you*. Particularly outside North America, it's sometimes considered to be too direct, too personal. The alternative, however, is usually either passive (with no subject) or third person ("he," "they," or worse, "one").

Addressing the reader as *you* is not only commonplace now, but almost universal in instructional writing—anywhere you want to tell your reader to do something. It's concise and makes clear what actions the reader needs to take. Don't avoid second-person writing. This book is written in the second person.

Example

More information can be found in the appendix. (**Passive**)

You'll find more information in the appendix. (**Second person**)

The imperative style is written in the second person but without using "you." It's direct and concise. Each sentence normally begins with a verb, such as "type" or "complete." Imperative is typically used in procedure writing, when addressing the reader as "you" would be repetitive.

Example

To join the society, complete the application form and send a copy to national headquarters. Attach a cheque for your first year's fees. (**Imperative**)

Try one: Rewrite in the imperative

In order to see a list of assigned access codes, it is necessary that you type FIL at the command line.

Third person ("he" and "they")

Write in the third person when neither you nor the reader are involved in the action. For example, use the third person if you are writing to one person and discussing another person. But never write in the third person when you're talking about the reader—it's impersonal and bureaucratic.

Example

Clerks must process contractor invoices within 30 days. If they have any questions, they should contact the cost centre manager.

Exercise 10: Put "I" and "we" in your writing

Rewrite the following sentences using either "I" or "we" as the subject:

1. Errors were made in processing the payroll.

2. The report had to be edited and converted to HTML before it could go on the intranet.

3. The arbitration was not going well so the best negotiator was called in.

Exercise 11: Put "you" in your writing

Rewrite the following sentences addressing the reader as "you" (and make them plain English):

1. Prior to the completion of the report, it is important to check the cross-references for accuracy.

2. In the solicitation of review comments, it is necessary to allocate an appropriate period of time.

3. Modifications to the annual report are not easy to facilitate once it has been printed.

4. Analysis of the information requirements of staff could conceivably impact the current methodology of technical manual distribution.

Sentence length

Long sentences are tough to read. Most readers prefer short sentences, particularly skimmers and scanners—typical business readers. Some writers use a rule of 25 to 30 words. Others simply avoid joining independent clauses (complete sentences) together, usually with a conjunction. Instead, they create two sentences.

Avoid using semicolons to join related independent clauses. In business writing, they're seldom needed. And most of your readers will not understand the meaning of a semicolon. Use two sentences instead.

Types of sentences

Avoid complicated sentence structures when a simple one will do. The simplest sentences are the easiest to read.

Simple sentences

Simple sentences consist of a subject, a verb, and an object.

Example

I fired him.
(**Subject-verb-object**)

Complex sentences

Complex sentences consist of a main clause (independent clause) and a subordinate clause (dependent clause).

Example

Because I hired him, I had to fire him.

Compound sentences

Compound sentences consist of at least two independent clauses, often joined by a conjunction.

Example

I fired 28 employees this year, and next year I hope to fire even more employees.

Compound-complex sentences

Compound-complex sentences consist of least two independent clauses and at least one dependent clause.

Example

I fired 28 employees this year (**independent clause**), and next year I hope to fire even more employees (**independent clause**) because that's part of my job (**dependent clause**).

Exercise 12: Shorten long sentences

Divide the following sentences into two or more shorter sentences:

We are prepared to cooperate with your consultants in the preparation of a schedule, but we insist on maintaining complete control of the work as outlined in Article 12 of the General Conditions of the Contract and any such schedule must be prepared in a manner and form suitable to use as a tool and guide to management for all construction operations on the site.

The facts clearly indicate that motor cars with faulty brakes are being driven on our streets and highways yet government officials have not taken action to protect the responsible motorist and the general public.

The shipping clerk may have only a vague notion of what happens to the four copies of the bill of lading forwarded to the sales order and billing departments; however, this will not affect the clerk's ability to assess a proposed recommendation about internal control.

We find the division of business into accounting systems a convenient structure for evaluating internal control, although management may view its business differently, perhaps in terms of areas of functional responsibilities.

Exercise 13: Break up very long sentences

Rewrite the following 62-word sentence into several shorter sentences:

Our proposal, while indicative of the general approach we would take if we were awarded the contract to write and produce the annual report, does not specifically address the time and costs that would be required to complete the project because not enough substantive information was provided in the request for proposal, which was sent to us by registered mail on January 2.

Word choice

Word choice is critical to reader friendliness, and is one of the two aspects of writing measured by the fog index. If you use the same everyday words that you use in normal conversation, you'll be writing in plain English.

The English language has a large vocabulary—the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary* defines 120,000 words. Yet, so many of these words are not in day-to-day use. For every common word, there are usually a half dozen or more synonyms with essentially the same meaning.

Avoid words that are:

- not used regularly in conversation ("obfuscate")
- legal sounding ("pursuant to")
- too big for the job ("contemporaneous")
- clichés ("despite the fact that")
- from foreign languages ("ipso facto")

Instead of...	Use...
approximately	about
compensate	pay
disseminate	send, distribute
pertaining to	of, about
prior to	before
shall	will
subsequent	after
under the provisions of	under
utilize	use
verbose	wordy

Technical terminology

When choosing words, carefully consider the needs of new employees and those using English as their second language.

Before using a technical term, consider your readers. Will they understand it? Technical terminology has its place—it speeds communication between people who share the same technical background and expertise. For others, however, technical terms are just meaningless words. The more expert you become at a subject, the more likely you'll be tempted to use technical terms.

Here are some technical terms from different areas:

Legal	**Medical**
real property conveyance plaintiff licensee	contusion haemorrhage radius infarction
Computer	**Accounting**
window RAM interface user ID	accrual trial balance debit/credit ledger

Even if your readers will likely know a term, define it the first time you use it. It doesn't have to be a formal definition.

Example of informal definition of technical term

"The *radius*, the thicker and shorter of the two bones in the forearm, is…"

Notice in the above example that the word *radius* is in italics. This is the normal way to indicate that you are discussing or defining a word and not using it.

Longer technical publications also benefit from a *glossary*, a dictionary-like listing of technical terms and their definitions. Even if your readers don't see the definition in the text, they can always turn to the glossary.

Acronyms

Acronyms consist of the initial letters of compound terms (like DOS, for Disk Operating System). Avoid them when you're not sure that all of your readers will know what they stand for. The only exception would be when the acronym is more commonly used than the full term (such as "scuba") or is so widely used that everyone will know what it stands for (such as "USA"). Never create acronyms for your own convenience.

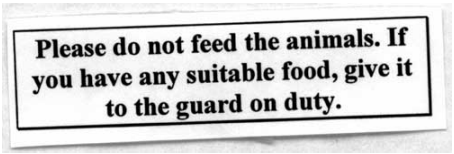
When you do use acronyms, spell them out the first time with the acronym in parentheses following, then use the acronym after that.

Example

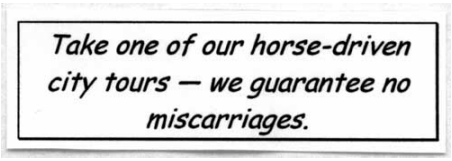
This heating ventilating and air conditioning (HVAC) distributor has designed a software program for its HVAC engineers.

Signs and Notices From Around the World:

Budapest Zoo



Czechoslovak Tourist Agency



Frank Lingua, the nation's leading purveyor of buzzwords and catch phrases, interviewed by Business Finance contributing editor Dan Danbom.

Danbom: Is being a cliché expert a full-time job?

Lingua: Bottom line is I have a full plate 24/7.

Danbom: Is it hard to keep up with the seemingly endless supply of clichés that spew from business?

Lingua: Some days, I don't have the bandwidth.

Danbom: So it's difficult?

Lingua: Harder than nailing Jell-O to the wall. That's why I have to circle back to partner and expose the key learnings.

Danbom: Give us a new buzzword that we'll be hearing.

Lingua: "Enronitis" could be a next-generation player. I also like "criticality."

Danbom: Do people understand your role as a cliché expert?

Lingua: No, they can't get their arms around that. But they aren't incented to.

Danbom: Did incomprehensibility come naturally to you?

Lingua: I wasn't wired that way, but it became mission-critical as I strategically focused on my go-forward plan.

Danbom: How do you stay ahead of others in the buzzword industry?

Lingua: Net-net, my value proposition is based on maximizing synergies and being first to market with a leveraged, value-added deliverable.

Danbom: Do you read "Dilbert" in the newspaper?

Lingua: My knowledge base is deselective of fiber media.

Danbom: Does that mean "no"?

Lingua: Negative.

Danbom: DOES THAT MEAN "NO"?

Lingua: Our research shows your consumer mindset is tilting on a negative axis Let's circle back and discuss this offline.

Danbom: I hate you.

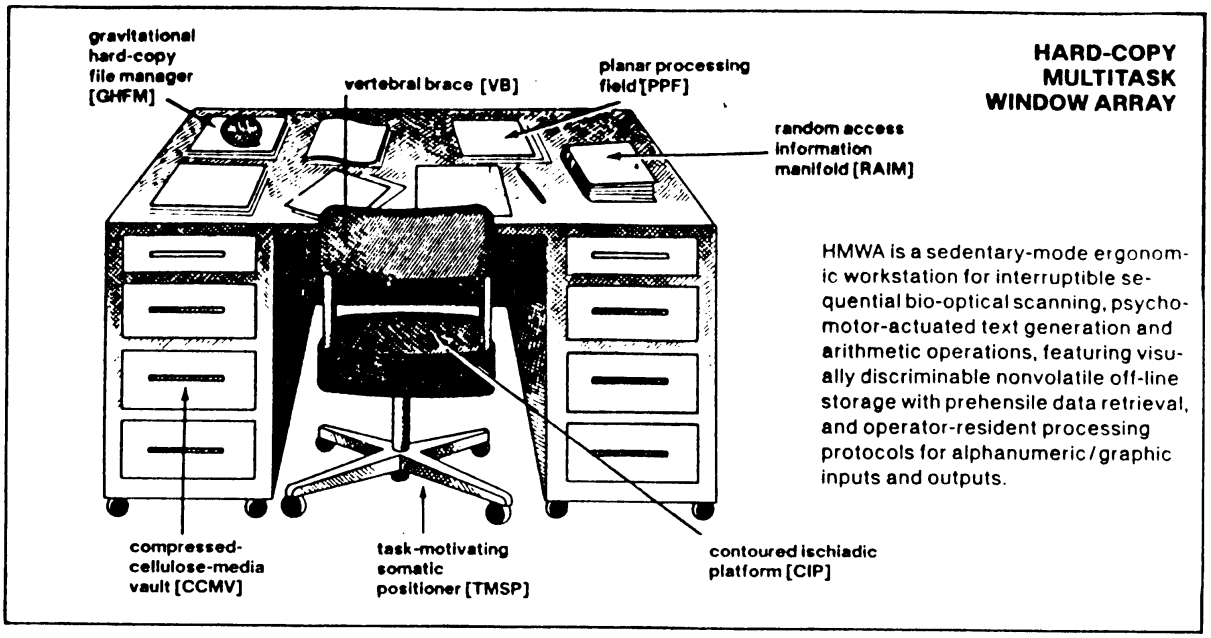
Lingua: Take it and run with it.

Buzzword generator

This popular buzzword generator can create thousands of meaningless terms. Be careful that your writing doesn't sound like it came from one.

To use, choose a word from column A, another word from column B, and a final word from column C.

Column A	Column B	Column C
integrated	management	options
total	organizational	communication
structured	monitored	security
parallel	reciprocal	mobility
functional	digital	programming
responsive	logical	software
optional	transitional	time-phase
synchronized	5th generation	projection
compatible	incremental	hardware
balanced	analog	firmware


gravitational hard-copy file manager [GHFM]
vertebral brace [VB]
planar processing field [PPF]
random access information manifold [RAIM]
HARD-COPY MULTITASK WINDOW ARRAY
HMWA is a sedentary-mode ergonomic workstation for interruptible sequential bio-optical scanning, psychomotor-actuated text generation and arithmetic operations, featuring visually discriminable nonvolatile off-line storage with prehensile data retrieval, and operator-resident processing protocols for alphanumeric/graphic inputs and outputs.
compressed-cellulose-media vault [CCMV]
task-motivating somatic positioner [TMSP]
contoured ischiadic platform [CIP]

Exercise 14: Use everyday words

Replace the underlined words with simple, everyday words:

the commencement date is August 1	_____
we will have to remunerate you	_____
the methodology is under review	_____
they utilized the photocopier	_____
she obtained the proper forms	_____
they ascertained that	_____
he was cognizant of the fact that	_____
subsequent to our meeting	_____
she replied in the affirmative	_____
the expenditure was approximately $50	_____

If Dr. Seuss Wrote Technical Manuals for Computers

If a packet hits a pocket on a socket on a port, and the bus is interrupted as a very last resort, and the address of the memory makes your floppy disk abort, then the socket packet pocket has an error to report.

If your cursor finds a menu item followed by a dash, and the double-clicking icon puts your window in the trash, and your data is corrupted 'cause the index doesn't hash, then your situation's hopeless and your system's gonna crash.

If the label on the cable on the table at your house says the network is connected to the button on your mouse, but your packets want to tunnel on another protocol, that's repeatedly rejected by the printer down the hall, and your screen is all distorted by the side effects of gauss, so the icons in the window are as wavy as a souse, then you may as well reboot and go out with a bang, 'cause as sure as I'm a poet, the sucker's gonna hang.

When the copy of your floppy's getting sloppy on the disk and the macrocode instructions cause unnecessary risk, then you have to flash your memory and you'll want to RAM your ROM, quickly turn off the computer and be sure to tell your mom!

Sentence order

Subject-verb-object sentence order works best because it:

- is easiest to understand (subject first, action second, and object of the verb last)
- minimizes the number of words
- uses active verbs

> Example
>
> Consultants appreciate respect. (**Subject-verb-object**)
>
> Respect is appreciated by consultants. (**Object-verb-subject**)

While subject-verb-object is the preferred sentence order, all sentences should not be forced into this order. Some variation is normal and depends on:

- the information you have to convey
- the order of the previous sentences (sometimes you'll want to use the same order, other times you'll want to vary it)
- how well established the subject is (you may not want to continually repeat the subject)
- whether your focus is the subject, the verb (the action), or the object

Active and passive verbs

Active sentences are ones that include a subject (the doer of the action), and the subject is placed before the verb. Passive sentences either have no subject, or the subject is placed after the verb.

Active sentences	Passive sentences
They hold a patent. (**4 words**)	A patent is held by them. (**6 words**)
The GST has complicated accounting. (**5 words**)	Complications in accounting have been caused by the GST. (**9 words**)
The partners decided to pay consultants more money. (**8 words**)	A decision was made by the partners to pay consultants more money. (**12 words**)

Reasons to use active sentences:

- easiest to understand (subject first, action second, and object of the verb last)
- clear and direct
- minimizes the number of words
- avoids weak passive verbs ("is held" instead of "hold")

So what's wrong with passive? Nothing, unless all of your sentences are passive, in which case, your writing will be weaker and wordier than it needs to be. While most good writers prefer active sentences, they will naturally alternate back and forth between active and passive sentences.

Reasons to use passive sentences:

- the subject is already well established
- you don't want to point the finger of blame at someone
- you want to focus on the action, not who did it

Example

A serious accounting error was made. (**Appropriate use of passive**)

Notice in the above example that the writer has not named the person who made the accounting error. This might be very prudent!

Exercise 15: Use active verbs

Rewrite the following sentences in the active voice:

No option has been selected by the committee.

Error messages are found in the appendix.

Omissions were discovered during the word processing of the report.

The transition is intended to produce no disruption of service.

Use strong verbs

Strong verbs are usually weakened when they are made into nouns. In most cases, you can strengthen the sentence, and cut out unnecessary words, by simply letting the original verb function as the verb.

Exercise 16: Avoid weak verbs

Instead of...	**Use...**
give an answer to	_____
reach a conclusion	_____
do an inspection	_____
raise an objection	_____
send an invitation to	_____
provide a solution	_____
form a plan	_____
conduct an analysis	_____
make a distinction	_____
have knowledge of	_____
make a proposal	_____
hold a meeting	_____

Verb tenses

These are the basic verb tenses:

Verb tense	Example
past	I wrote
present	I write
future	I will write
past perfect	I had written
present perfect	I have written
future perfect	I will have written

Use past tense for:

- investigative reports ("We found that…")
- performance reviews ("Joe performed his job well…")
- results of tests and experiments ("The questionnaire showed that…")
- references to other documents ("The annual report documented…")
- other backward-looking documents

Use present tense for:

- policies ("Applicants are evaluated…")
- procedures and instructions ("The clerks process the form…")
- most letters, memos, and emails ("I'm happy to tell you that…")
- scientific facts and other truths ("Water freezes at 0°C.")
- data within a report ("The frequency increases with education.")

Use future tense for:

- plans ("The company will open two new branches…")
- other forward-looking documents

Most business writing uses either past, present, or future tense. The perfect tenses are used less frequently. You may have been told in school not to mix verb tenses. Actually, you can as long as you use tenses consistently and they reflect the actual time relationships.

Examples

The executive stayed (**past**) in the office while the staff picket (**present**). (**No, inconsistent**)

The executive stayed (**past**) in the office while the staff picketed (**past**). (**Yes, consistent**)

It is (**present**) our policy that once you have received (**past perfect**) the report, you will be able to (**future**) submit review comments.
(**Yes, because it reflects actual time relationships**)

Examples of unclear writing

These sentences are actual examples taken from letters received by a welfare department.

"I am forwarding my marriage certificate and six children. I have seven, but one was baptized on a half sheet of paper."

"Mrs. Jones has not had any clothes for a year and has been visited by the clergy regularly."

"I cannot get sick pay, I have six children. Can you tell me why?"

"I am glad to report that my husband who was missing is dead."

"This is my eighth child. What are you going to do about it?"

"In answer to your letter, I have given birth to a boy weighing ten pounds. I hope this is satisfactory."

"I want my money as quick as I can get it, I've been to bed with the doctor for two weeks and he doesn't do me any good. If things don't improve I will have to send for another doctor."

"I am forwarding my marriage certificate and three children, one of which is a mistake as you can see."

"My husband got his project cut off two weeks ago and I haven't had any relief since."

"Unless I get some money soon, I will be forced to lead an immortal life."

"You have changed my little boy to a girl. Will this make any difference?"

"I have no children yet as my husband is a truck driver and works day and night."

"In accordance with your instructions, I have given birth to twins in the enclosed envelope."

"I am very much annoyed to find you have branded my son illiterate. This is a dirty lie as I was married a week before he was born."

"Please find for certain if my husband is dead. The man I am now living with can't eat or do anything until he knows."

MODULE 5

20 Rules of Plain English

NOW that you've mastered the basics of plain English, you'll want to learn more of the rules. This module covers 20 of the most important rules to remember as you write. These are the rules that most writing styleguides agree on.

Of course, rules are meant to be broken, and these are no exception. The rules are meant to provide you with useful guidelines to help you make writing decisions—not to be followed slavishly.

20 key rules:

- write in parallel ways
- keep related words together
- use prepositions with care
- distinguish "which" from "that"
- avoid surplus nouns
- avoid noun and modifier strings
- use pronouns with care
- avoid slang
- be gender neutral
- be specific
- avoid clichés
- place modifiers carefully
- avoid unnecessary qualification
- use contractions
- be concise
- avoid foreign words
- capitalize properly
- abbreviate with care
- write numbers consistently
- ignore some old rules

Write in parallel ways

Parallelism means being consistent in how you structure your writing. Once you establish a pattern, use it. Parallelism makes reading faster and easier.

Keep items in a list parallel. Each item should be constructed in a similar way and start with the same kind of word, such as a noun or verb. If one item is a whole sentence, they all should be.

Examples: Parallel sentences

Originally, writing was taught by analysis, while now a synthesis approach is used. (**Not parallel**)

Originally, writing was taught by analysis; now it is taught by synthesis. (**Parallel**)

The evaluation report was written outlining the case study and with a list of contributors. (**Not parallel**)

The evaluation report was written outlining the case study and listing the contributors. (**Parallel**)

Example: Not parallel list

Students must bring the following items:

- styleguide
- bring pencils and pens
- You should bring a word processor.

Example: Parallel list

Students must bring the following items:

- styleguide
- pencils and pens
- word processor

Exercise 17: Make the last three items parallel to the first

The plan is deficient because:

- the budget was not prepared
- Two major cost items were not identified.

- staffing not approved

- other errors

Keep related words together

Keep related words together—otherwise confusion and ambiguity may result.

Examples

She noticed a cigarette burn on the desk that was right in the centre.
(**No, right in the centre of what?**)

She noticed a cigarette burn on the centre of the desk. (**Yes**)

He wrote three pages on how to use the computer for the user manual.
(**No, not just for the computer manual**)

He wrote three pages for the user manual on how to use the computer. (**Yes**)

Try one

The president said she hoped all employees would give generously to the charity at a staff meeting today.

_____

_____

_____

Use prepositions with care

Prepositions are words that connect or relate nouns and pronouns to other words. They can relate things spatially, in time, or figuratively.

Some common prepositions:

- about
- at
- beneath
- by
- of
- on
- through
- to
- with
- according to
- across
- down
- for
- into
- next to
- on top of
- over
- up

For years, many students were told not to end sentences with prepositions (a *dangling* preposition). This is a rule that you should ignore. English has always had sentences that end with prepositions.

Examples

That's a behaviour we can't put up with.

That's an area we don't want to get into.

He's the consultant you spoke about.

This is the styleguide they referred to.

Winston Churchill was once corrected by a senior army officer for ending a sentence with a preposition. His reply was, "That is the sort of English up with which I will not put." His reply pokes fun at the awkward sentences that often result if you try to avoid ending a sentence with a preposition.

Examples of bad fixes

That's an area into which we don't want to get.

He's the consultant about whom you spoke.

This is the styleguide about which they referred.

If your sentences sometimes sound like these, are you avoiding placing a preposition at the end? Many writers do, but don't realize that's what they're doing.

Omit prepositions if you can without changing the meaning. In the following examples, the underlined prepositions are unnecessary and can be omitted.

Examples

All <u>of</u> the managers went to the meeting.

We moved the files off <u>of</u> the server.

The study area is too near <u>to</u> the cafeteria.

We began <u>at</u> about 9:00 a.m.

Distinguish “which” from “that”

Use “which” to introduce non-restrictive clauses—clauses that don’t narrow or *restrict* the meaning. Such clauses could be put into parentheses or removed entirely without altering the essential meaning of the sentence.

Use “that” for restrictive clauses—clauses that narrow or restrict the meaning. Such clauses are always integral to the sentence, and could not be put into parentheses or removed entirely without altering the essential meaning of the sentence.

“Which” and “that” are punctuated differently. Because “which” introduces a clause that could be placed in parentheses, it is preceded with a comma. But because “that” introduces a clause that’s integral to the sentence and could not be placed in parentheses, it is not preceded with a comma.

Example

We rejected the last proposal, which was sent by fax. (**The rejected proposal happens to have been faxed**)

We rejected the last proposal that was sent by fax. (**But not necessarily the last proposal**)

Exercise 18: “Which” and “that”

Review each sentence and decide if “which” and “that” are used correctly:

The manager plans to take us to the new Thai restaurant <u>that</u> is in our old office building.

Penticton, <u>which</u> lies within the Okanagan Valley, is shown on the attached map.

The proposal, <u>which</u> we liked best, was from Acme Printing and Binding.

The Committee reviewed the best plans <u>that</u> were submitted.

We could not find the digital file, <u>which</u> was missing.

Avoid surplus nouns

Avoid nouns that don't add meaning or precision. Watch out for:

- approach
- area
- concept
- condition
- location
- environment
- situation
- type

Example

They were interested in the decentralized decision-making concept. (**No**)

They were interested in decentralized decision making. (**Yes**)

Try one

The meeting was delayed by the courier shortage situation.

_____

_____

Avoid noun and modifier strings

Avoid stringing nouns or modifiers together. Even two-word strings can be taken in several ways. How many different meanings can you think of for "management option"?

_____

_____

_____

Instead, unstack strings to make the meaning clear. Before you use strings, ask yourself if all your readers will know what you're talking about.

Instead of...	Write...
component reference designators	designators for referring to components
marketing plan analysis	analysis of the marketing plan
long-range failure prevention program	long-range program for preventing failures
typical user interface problem area	areas where users typically have problems

Exercise 19: Rewrite the following noun and modifier strings so their meaning is clear

problem responsibility changes

ad hoc report generation utility

obsolete cardholder file

operator-induced failure-rate increase problem

non-literate personnel manager

Use pronouns with care

A *pronoun* is a word that represents a noun. The noun that it refers back to is its *antecedent*. Here are some common pronouns:

- I
- you
- he
- she
- they
- which
- them
- their
- it
- this
- that
- one

Pronouns force readers to remember the antecedent. In some cases, the antecedent may not be clear.

Example

The manager's expense reports were incomplete and were beyond the per diem rates set out in the Superintendent's policy guidelines. This prevented them from being processed. (**Antecedents not clear**)

The manager's expense reports were incomplete and were beyond the per diem rates set out in the Superintendent's policy guidelines. The lack of completion prevented the reports from being processed. (**Clear**)

Personal pronouns

Don't be afraid to use personal pronouns, particularly "I," "we," and "you." They give your writing a natural human quality. See *Person*, page 115).

Some writers get confused between subjective and objective cases of pronouns.

Example

I gave him the file, but he gave me nothing. (**Okay**)

Bob and me went over the figures together (**No, "Bob and I"**)

The above example is confusing because of the compound subject "Bob and me." In this case, you can check the pronoun "me" by temporarily omitting "Bob."

List of personal pronouns

			Subjective	Objective	Possessive
First person	Singular		I	me	my/mine
	Plural		we	us	our/ours
Second person	Singular		you	you	your/yours
	Plural		you	you	your/yours
Third person	Singular	Masculine	he	him	his
		Feminine	she	her	hers
		Neutral	it	it	its
	Plural		they	them	theirs/theirs

Avoid slang

Avoid slang (also known as *colloquialisms*)—words, or uses of accepted words, that are not generally considered proper. Many commonly accepted words began as slang, but have come into general use. When you decide that a word is acceptable will depend on how liberal or conservative you are with the language, and how formal your document is.

Examples of slang

It was cutting-edge technology.

Cursor over to the right of the screen.

His presentation was totally radical.

Hey, dude, look at these figures!

Some writers will use slang, but place it in single quotes. Here's what Strunk and White, authors of *The Elements of Style*, have to say about this practice:

If you use a colloquialism, or a slang word or phrase, simply use it; do not draw attention to it by enclosing it in quotation marks. To do so is to put on airs, as though you were inviting the reader to join you in a select society of those who know better.

New words to consider:

AQUADEXTROUS (ak wa deks' trus) adj. Possessing the ability to turn a faucet on and off with your toes.

CARPERPETUATION (kar' pur pet u a shun) n. The act, when vacuuming, of running over a string or a piece of lint at least a dozen times, reaching over and picking it up, examining it, then putting it back down to give the vacuum one more chance.

DISCONFECT (dis kon fekt') v. To sterilize a piece of candy you dropped on the floor by blowing on it, assuming this will somehow remove all the germs.

ELBONICS (el bon' iks) n. The actions of two people manoeuvring for one armrest in a movie theatre.

FRUST (frust) n. The small line of debris that refuses to be swept onto the dust pan and keeps backing a person across the room until he or she finally decides to give up and sweep it under the rug.

LACTOMANGULATION (lak' toe man gyu lay' shun) n. Manhandling the "open here" spout on a milk container so badly that one has to resort to the illegal side.

PEPPIER (pehp ee ay') n. The waiter at a fancy restaurant whose sole purpose seems to be walking around asking diners if they want ground pepper.

Be gender neutral

Don't make assumptions about gender. If you're talking about all managers, don't use "he" or "she" or "his" or "hers" unless you know that it will always be one gender or the other.

Avoid gender-specific nouns. Many new gender-neutral nouns have entered the language in the last few decades. Here are just a few:

Gender specific	Gender neutral
chairman	chair or chairperson
fisherman	fisher
actress	actor
fireman	firefighter
waitress	server
delegates and their wives	delegates and their spouses
workman	worker

Many writers run into trouble with personal pronouns because English does not have singular gender-neutral personal pronouns. "He," "his," "she," and "hers" are all gender specific. Pronouns such as "they," "their," and "them," while neutral, must refer back to plural antecedents.

Example

The manager (antecedent) must submit his (pronoun) budget to head office. (**Gender specific**)

The managers must submit their reports to head office. (**Gender neutral**)

The manager must submit the report to head office. (**Pronoun omitted**)

Use these tactics to avoid gender-specific pronouns, or worse, awkward constructions like "he/she."

- Repeat the noun (despite what your English teacher may have said, don't worry about using the same word over again).
- If appropriate, make the antecedent plural so you can use "they," "them," or "their" (for example, talk about "clerks" instead of "the clerk").
- Drop the pronoun entirely, or re-cast the sentence so that a pronoun is not necessary.

Be specific

Avoid abstract or inexact terms. In business, your readers are looking for solid, descriptive information—facts, figures, and directions.

Exercise 20: Revise these sentences to replace the general and the inexact with the exact and the concrete

Mud the gyproc with a thin layer of filler, then wait for awhile before sanding.

To ensure that the deadline can be met, the draft must be finished quickly.

Some staff experienced computer problems.

Turn the bolt until it's quite tight.

Avoid unnecessary expenditures.

Be aware of suspicious transactions.

Avoid clichés

Clichés are time-worn phrases that have lost their original freshness, and can usually be replaced with one or two simple words.

Many of the more colourful clichés, such as "let's not beat around the bush," have lost their original literal meaning. While readers know this cliché means "let's get to it," most could not explain the significance of the "bush" or the act of "beating."

Exercise 21: Replace the following clichés with everyday words

please feel free to call _____

between a rock and hard place _____

in connection with _____

with regard to _____

six of one, half a dozen of the other _____

with respect to _____

easier said than done _____

as already stated _____

pursuant to your letter _____

all things considered _____

enclosed herewith is _____

to say the least _____

to explore every avenue _____

in the neighbourhood of _____

to a certain extent _____

as a matter of fact _____

suffice it to say _____

hit the nail on the head _____

the fact of the matter is _____

we beg to acknowledge _____

avoid clichés like the plague _____

Place modifiers carefully

Watch where you place modifiers, such as “only,” “almost,” “already,” “even,” “just,” “nearly,” “merely,” and “always.”

Consider how the placement of one of these small words can alter the meaning of the sentence.

Example

The company wants to negotiate the union’s offer.

Only the company wants to negotiate the union’s offer.

The company wants only to negotiate the union’s offer.

The company wants to negotiate only the union’s offer.

The company wants to negotiate the union’s only offer.

The company wants to negotiate the union’s offer only.

Examples

They just wanted a time extension. (**No**)

They wanted just a time extension. (**Better**)

They almost spent five days writing the report. (**No**)

They spent almost five days writing the report. (**Yes**)

Try one

The annual report only provides year-end figures.

_____

_____

From Monday’s classified ads:

FORE SALE - R.D. Jones has one sewing machine for sale. Phone 555-0707 after 7 p.m. and ask for Mrs. Kelly who lives with him cheap

From Tuesday’s classified ads:

NOTICE - We regret having erred in R.D. Jone’s ad yesterday. It should have read: One sewing machine for sale. Cheap: Call 555-0707 and ask for Mrs. Kelly who lives with him after 7 p.m

Avoid unnecessary qualification

Don't qualify words that don't need to be qualified:

- totally committed
- completely devoted
- utterly rejected
- perfectly clear
- entirely finished
- quite precise
- radically new
- totally compatible
- somewhat unique
- relatively precise
- partially committed

Use contractions

Contractions are words formed by joining two words together and dropping some letters. Use contractions to give your writing an informal, conversational tone. Without them, your writing will sound formal and maybe a bit stilted.

You may want to avoid using contractions in formal documents, such as legal contracts or annual reports, or where you want to emphasize the words. For example, "You *will* go to the doctor!"

Common contractions	
can't	cannot
don't	do not
I'd	I would
I'll	I will
I'm	I am
it'll	it will
it's	it is
she'd/he'd	she would/he would
she'll/he'll	she will/he will
she's/he's	she is/he is
there's	there is
they'll	they will
they're	they are
we're	we are
won't	will not
you'll	you will
you're	you are

Be concise

Remove all unnecessary words to keep your writing as short as possible. You may find that your first draft contains unnecessary wording or redundant expressions. Take the time to weed out these space wasters. Your readers will thank you.

Ways to reduce words:

- understand what your readers need
- stick to essential information and skip the marginal details
- use active verbs
- use everyday words
- avoid redundant expressions, such as “abundantly clear”
- avoid clichés, such as “in the neighbourhood of”

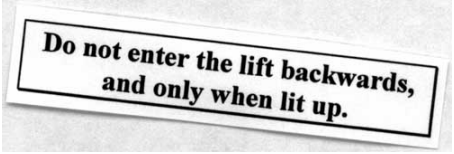
Ways not to eliminate words or to make it look like fewer words:

- drop articles and verbs (see *Abbreviated scientific style*, page 7)
- use acronyms instead
- make the type smaller than 10 points
- reduce line spacing or widen the text column

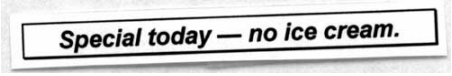
The chances of someone reading your writing are inversely proportional to its size.

Signs and Notices From Around the World:

Leipzig Elevator



Swiss Inn



Avoid foreign words

Avoid foreign words in your writing, unless they have come into common use or there's no substitute.

Exercise 22: What do these foreign words and phrases mean?

pro bono _____

gratis _____

ipso facto _____

c'est la vie _____

tout fini _____

savoir faire _____

je ne sais quoi _____

Avoid Latin abbreviations. Most of your readers won't know the words that these terms abbreviate. In particular, many people confuse "e.g." and "i.e."

Exercise 23: What Latin words do these abbreviations stand for?

e.g. _____

i.e. _____

etc. _____

Spell them out in full:

Abbreviation	English equivalent
e.g.	"for example" or "for instance"
i.e.	"that is" or "that is to say"
etc.	"and so on" or introduce the list with "such as"

Avoid Roman numerals—many of your readers will get confused.

Exercise 24: Translate these numbers

IX _____

M _____

CM _____

XC _____

MCMXCIX _____

MM _____

Capitalize properly

Capitalize proper nouns only—names of people, objects, and entities. Don't capitalize a word because you think it's important or you want it to stand out. Capitalization helps readers distinguish the names of things from the descriptions of things.

Some capitalization varies depending on local practice. For example, some organizations usually capitalize the following words:

- Board
- Act
- Corporation
- Company

Exercise 25: List 10 types of things that should be capitalized

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Exercise 26: Should these be capitalized?

Review the following and decide if they're capitalized correctly:

- Audit Of Financial And Management Practices (title of report)
- Kootenay regional district
- the Regional District (referring to above)
- district management staff
- the transportation of dangerous goods act
- the Act (referring to above)
- lower mainland
- greater Vancouver
- Northwestern British Columbia
- we audited three Ministries
- the insurance corporation of British Columbia
- the Corporation (referring to ICBC)
- the Board heard three submissions
- the Manager, Human Resources
- the manager of human resources

Abbreviate with care

Abbreviations, acronyms, and initialisms, referred to here simply as "abbreviations," are just code to those who don't know them, so use them with care. While they may make for quick communications among those in the know, they're a problem particularly for newcomers and novices.

Example

The ADM cc'd the Mgr. ISD on the email to the dept. reps re: the LCDs, and attached the SOP on PDFing POs (Form 223). (**Avoid—spell them out**)

Tips on using abbreviations:

- use as few as possible, and only when readers will understand them
- never coin any of your own
- avoid abbreviations of foreign words, such as "i.e.," "e.g.," and "etc."—use the English equivalents
- spell them out the first time you use them
- form the plural by simply adding an "s"—don't use an apostrophe unless it would be confusing (for example, "CRTs" but "GI's")
- generally, drop periods unless it would be confusing, or it's accepted practice ("BC," "IBM," "COD," "ft")
- always use periods for "Mr.," "Mrs.," "Ltd.," "Co.," and "Dr."—it's accepted practice

Did you know?

Though the term "abbreviations" is used here to cover abbreviations, acronyms, and initialisms, the following are definitions of each.

Abbreviation – a shortened form of a word, such as "ft."

Acronym – composed of the initial letters or parts of a compound term that is usually read as a single word, rather than letter by letter, such as "scuba" (self-contained underwater breathing apparatus).

Initialism – composed of the initial letters or parts of a compound term, but usually read letter by letter, rather than as a single word, such as "rpm" (revolutions per minute).

Write numbers consistently

Guidelines for using numbers in text:

- spell out numbers from one through nine
- use figures for 10 and greater, except numbers rounded to millions (for example, "10 million")
- if one number in a sentence is 10 or greater, then use figures for all numbers (for example, "4 apples, 5 oranges, and 12 pears")—except for "one," which is always spelled out
- always spell out a number used at the beginning of a sentence
- form plurals of numbers by adding "s" (for example, "747s")

Ignore some old rules

Here are some of the rules of English usage that you can safely ignore in business writing:

- don't use personal pronouns, such as "I," "we," or "you," except in informal documents (see *Writing points of view*, page 39, and *Use pronouns with care*, page 62)
- don't use simple, everyday words—use your thesaurus and find an impressive one! (see *Word choice*, page 44)
- don't use contractions (see *Use contractions*, page 68)
- avoid dangling prepositions (see *Use prepositions with care*, page 58)
- vary sentence structure to maintain reader interest (see *Active and passive verbs*, page 50)
- vary sentence length (see *Sentence length*, page 42)
- vary choice of words—never use the same word more than once or twice on the same page (see *Word choice*, page 44)
- never start a sentence with a conjunction, such as "because" or "and"

Why English is a crazy language

Let's face it—English is a crazy language:

- There is no egg in eggplant, nor ham in hamburger.
- There is neither apple nor pine in pineapple.
- English muffins weren't invented in England, nor French fries in France.
- Sweetmeats are candies, while sweetbreads, which aren't sweet, are meat.
- We take English for granted. But if we explore its paradoxes, we find that quicksand can work slowly.
- Boxing rings are square.
- A guinea pig is neither from Guinea, nor is it a pig.
- Why is it that writers write but fingers don't fing, grocers don't groce, and hammers don't ham?
- If the plural of tooth is teeth, why isn't the plural of booth beeth?
- One goose, two geese. So one moose, two meese? One index, two indices?
- Doesn't it seem crazy that you can make amends but not one amend? You can have noses that run and feet that smell?
- If you have a bunch of odds and ends and get rid of all but one of them, what do you call it?
- If teachers taught, why didn't preachers praught?
- If a vegetarian eats vegetables, what does a humanitarian eat?
- Sometimes I think all the English speakers should be committed to an asylum for the verbally insane.
- In what language do people recite at a play and play at a recital?
- How can a slim chance and a fat chance be the same, while a wise man and a wise guy are opposites?
- You have to marvel at the unique lunacy of a language in which your house can burn up as it burns down, you fill in a form by filling it out, and an alarm goes off by going on.
- English was invented by people, not computers, and it reflects the creativity of the human race, which, of course, is not a race at all.
- That is why when the stars are out, they are visible, but when the lights are out, they are invisible.

MODULE 6

Punctuation Matters

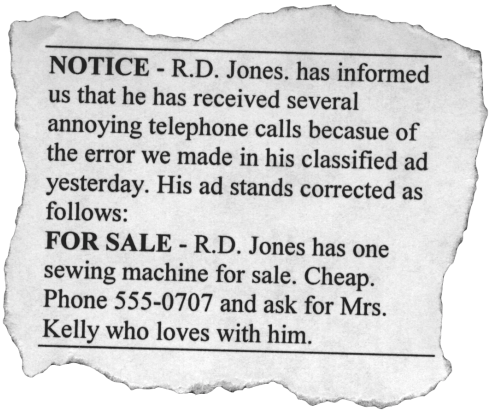
PUNCTUATION matters. Omitting a single comma can reverse the meaning of a sentence.

Correct punctuation guides your readers, telling them where to pause and where to stop. They separate your ideas into meaningful chunks, preventing your sentences from blurring together. They can also tell your readers when you're quoting a source, and when you've added or removed words from the quote.

Not all punctuation is used frequently in business writing. Some, such as ellipses and brackets, are more commonly used in other areas of writing—like journalism. Others, particularly periods and commas, are used in almost every sentence.

In this module, you'll learn about the various marks of punctuation and what they're used for. In particular, you'll learn about how to correctly use the trickier marks—the ones that writers tend to confuse—like commas, *em* dashes, and *en* dashes.

From Wednesday's classified ads:



NOTICE - R.D. Jones. has informed us that he has received several annoying telephone calls becasue of the error we made in his classified ad yesterday. His ad stands corrected as follows:
FOR SALE - R.D. Jones has one sewing machine for sale. Cheap. Phone 555-0707 and ask for Mrs. Kelly who loves with him.

Common marks of punctuation

Mark	Name	Use to…
.	period	End a sentence or indicate an abbreviation
,	comma	Separate list items, link complete thoughts, enclose parenthetic thoughts, or separate introductory phrases
;	semicolon	Separate two independent clauses not joined by a conjunction. Often thought of as a soft period
:	colon	Introduce a list
“ ”	double quotes	Indicate a quotation from a person or publication
‘ ’	single quotes	Indicate slang or a quotation within a quotation
( )	parentheses	Set off remarks that explain or comment on the sentence
[ ]	brackets	Indicate your own words within a quotation
…	ellipsis	Indicate words that have been deleted from a quotation
—	em dash	Enclose or set off parenthetic expressions or abrupt changes in thought
–	en dash	Indicate continuing or inclusive numbers, such as dates, times, or reference numbers
-	hyphen	Create hyphenated words, such as “co-worker,” or to create compound modifiers, such as “one-day course”
?	question mark	Indicate a question
!	exclamation mark	Emphasize a statement—infrequently used in business writing
&	ampersand	Replace “and”—spell out instead
/	slash	Indicate an and/or situation (avoid by stating whether one or both possibilities exist)

Commas (,)

Commas are the trickiest of the marks of punctuation, but one of the most important to use correctly. Here are six places to use commas.

1. **To separate three or more items in a list.**

Place a comma between each item. For business and technical writing, place a comma after the second-to-last item (this comma is commonly referred to as the *serial* comma). In other types of writing, the serial comma is often not used. In some writing situations, particularly with compound list items, using the serial comma prevents possible confusion.

Example

…computer, monitor, and keyboard.

2. **To separate two independent clauses (complete sentences) joined by a conjunction** (such as "and," "but," "for," "or," "nor," "yet," "still").

Example

The financial records of the company went up in smoke, and the general ledger cannot be reconstructed.

Don't use a comma if the two independent clauses are short and closely related.

Example

The company changed its policy and the number of complaints dropped immediately.

Don't use a comma before a clause that cannot stand on its own as a complete sentence.

Example

The president said that a public meeting would have to be held before the department would consider changing its policy.

3. **To set off introductory phrases or conditions**.

If the interruption to the flow of the sentence is slight, you can omit the comma.

Examples

Walking slowly up the hallway, he saw the crowd gathered around the coffee machine.

If the float is out by less than $10, ignore the difference.

In 2000 we decided not to file an income tax return. (**Comma omitted because interruption is slight**)

4. **To enclose parenthetic phrases and clauses**.

Parenthetic remarks are explanations or afterthoughts that are inserted into sentences that are grammatically complete without the insertion. Never use a single comma—always use two.

Examples

The taxes, which are unreasonable, will not be paid.

The tax audit started on April 20, 2001, and will be finished within one year.

5. **To separate consecutive adjectives that can be joined by "and" and whose order can be jumbled**.

These adjectives each modify the noun separately and are called *coordinate* adjectives.

Don't use a comma to separate adjectives that can't be joined by "and" and whose order can't be jumbled. These adjectives do not modify the noun separately and are called *cumulative* adjectives.

Don't use a comma to separate an adjective from the noun that follows it.

Example

She is a strong, confident, independent woman. (**Coordinate adjectives, which can be joined by "and" and can be jumbled**)

Four small red shapes emerged from the fog. (**Cumulative adjectives, which can't be joined by "and" and can't be jumbled**)

6. **To separate adverbs such as "accordingly," "further," "however," "thereafter," "indeed," "instead," "next," "similarly," and "finally" from the text that follows**.

Example

However, some revisions may be needed.

Colons and semicolons (: ;)

Use colons to introduce lists of items, whether in paragraph or bullet-list form.

Example

Bring the following items: pen, pencil, ruler, and eraser.

Bring the following items:

- pen
- pencil
- ruler
- eraser

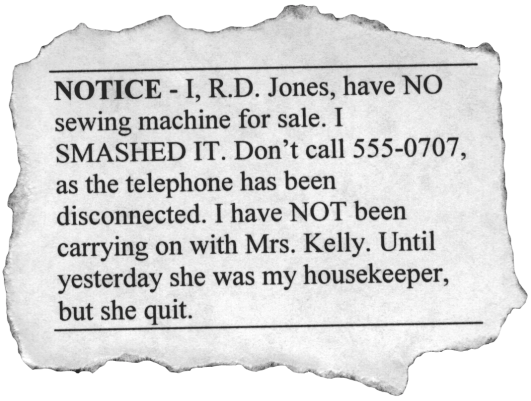
Use semicolons to separate two independent clauses not joined by a conjunction (such as "and" or "but"). Think of semicolons as light periods. In most business and technical writing, you can use two sentences instead.

Examples

It is nearly 4:30 p.m.; we cannot meet the deadline.

Work hard when you work; play hard when you play.

From Thursday's classified ads:



NOTICE - I, R.D. Jones, have NO sewing machine for sale. I SMASHED IT. Don't call 555-0707, as the telephone has been disconnected. I have NOT been carrying on with Mrs. Kelly. Until yesterday she was my housekeeper, but she quit.

Punctuating lists

There are three options for punctuating lists.

Option 1 – If the introductory phrase and the listed items are meant to be read as one complete sentence, then use the same punctuation and capitalization you would use in a paragraph.

Example: Option 1

Punctuate lists by:

- placing a comma (or possibly a semicolon) after each item,
- placing a comma after the second-to-last item (the *serial* comma), and
- concluding with a period.

Option 2 – When the listed items are single words or phrases and do not form complete sentences, then drop all punctuation. Some writers like to capitalize each item, while others do not. This is the simplest and most popular option.

Example: Option 2

Bring the following items to class:

- pens
- pencils
- books

Option 3 – When the listed items form complete, independent sentences, then capitalize each sentence and place a period at the end.

Example

Follow these rules for punctuating list items that are complete sentences:

- Make sure all items are complete sentences.
- Capitalize the first word of each sentence.
- Place a period at the end of each sentence.

Tips for creating lists:

- use lists for three or more items (no fewer)
- introduce each list with a sentence or phrase
- single-space lists of words or short phrases, and double-space lists of long phrases or sentences
- use bullets for lists, and numbers for steps
- structure all items in a list similarly (see *Write in parallel ways*, page 56)

Apostrophes (’)

Use an apostrophe to indicate a contraction or to form the possessive.

Contractions

The apostrophe replaces the omitted letters (see *Use contractions*, page 68).

Examples of contractions:

- he’s
- she’s
- doesn’t
- it’s

Singular possessive

Add “s” to any word to form the singular possessive—even singular words that end in “s.” It’s acceptable to use only an apostrophe if adding “s” makes the pronunciation awkward.

Example

Bob’s dilemma is Lewis’s opportunity.

Sophocles’ books are hard to understand. (**Acceptable because “Sophocles’s” would be awkward to pronounce**)

The possessive form of “it” is “its” (no apostrophe).

Plural possessive

Add the apostrophe after the “s.” If the word is plural but doesn’t end in “s,” add “’s.”

Example

Taxpayers’ rights

Children’s rights

Parentheses ( )

Parentheses set off remarks that explain or comment on the sentence, but are not directly related to the theme of the sentence.

Parenthetic remarks are disruptive to the reader, so avoid using them in business writing. If the remark is important, integrate it into the sentence, or create a new sentence. If not, omit it.

It's okay to use parentheses for spelling out acronyms and where the parenthetic remark is short.

Example

Students must return all materials (these include sample manuals and textbooks) to the instructor. (**Disruptive—avoid**)

Students must return all materials, such as sample manuals and textbooks, to the instructor. (**Preferred**)

The following example from the *Manual of the American Psychological Association* shows the rules for punctuation and parentheses.

Example

If the parenthetical item falls in the middle of the sentence (such as this), the comma follows the parenthesis. (If a complete sentence, like this one, is enclosed in parentheses, the period is placed inside the final parenthesis.) The period follows the parenthesis that falls at the end of a sentence (like this).

Quotation marks (“ ”)

Use quotation marks to indicate that you’re quoting exact words from a person or publication. If the quotation has a quotation within it, use single quotes for the inner quote. In Britain, this convention is reversed—single quotes go on the outside, and double quotes, if necessary, go on the inside.

Use curly quotes (“ ”), sometimes called *smart quotes*, rather than straight quotes (" "). Most word processors have a smart quotes feature you can turn on.

Place lengthy quotations consisting of a paragraph or more in a separate indented paragraph.

Commas and periods go inside the closing quote. Colons and semicolons go outside.

Example

The dictionary defines *harassment* as “any conduct, comment, gesture, or contact that causes offence, intimidates, or humiliates another.”

He said, “I prefer typewriters to computers”; this surprised us.

Where exclamation marks and question marks go depends on whether they are part of the quotation or part of the whole sentence.

Example

My youngest daughter asked, “When does the question mark go outside the quotation mark?”

Have you heard the old saying “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it”?

Also use quotation marks to refer to an article in a publication.

Example

Refer to the article “Writing Ability Critical to Career Success” in the *National Post*.

Hyphens (-)

Use hyphens sparingly. Don't use hyphens to equalize line lengths. A ragged-right margin is easier to read than an even one. In general, only use hyphens to avoid ambiguity or awkward pronunciation. Here are some examples of when to use a hyphen:

- with certain prefixes and suffixes (for example, "re-evaluate," "co-worker")
- with the prefixes "all-," "ex-," "non-," and "self-"
- after a series of words with a common base that is not repeated (for example, "short- and long-range planning")
- to create compound terms that precede the words they modify (for example, "well-designed plans," "up-to-date safety requirements," "one-day course")
- if the words in the compound term follow the words they modify, do not use a hyphen (for example, "the plans were well designed")
- to combine fractions and compound numbers from 21 to 99 (for example, "two-thirds," "one-quarter," "forty-nine")
- to combine numeral-unit adjectives (for example, "10-metre pipe")
- to combine an initial capital letter with a word (for example, "U-turn")

When using compound terms in headings, capitalize the word after the hyphen if it's a noun or proper adjective or if the words have equal weight. Do not capitalize a second word that modifies the first word (for example, "Follow-up Procedure").

Em dashes (—) and *en* dashes (–)

Em dash (—)

Use an *em* dash to enclose or set off parenthetic expressions—or abrupt changes in thought—when commas and parentheses aren't strong enough.

Use an *em* dash to expand on a phrase in the main clause of the sentence, or where a sentence is introduced by a list. Or use it to set off concluding remarks—for emphasis. But don't overuse *em* dashes—they become annoying after awhile.

Don't put spaces on either side of an *em* dash.

The *em* dash is not on your keyboard—it's a special character that you must insert into your document.

Examples

To further develop these ideas—this may be our last chance—we decided to meet at the beginning of next month.

Article 111.2, article 111.3, and article 119—all will influence this decision.

Use small caps for acronyms—for example, GVRD.

En Dash (–)

Use an *en* dash to indicate continuing or inclusive numbers, such as dates, times, or reference numbers. Don't put spaces on either side of an *en* dash.

Like the *em* dash, the *en* dash is not on your keyboard. It's a special character that you must insert into your document.

Examples

June–July 1922
10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.
pages 19–24

Keyword headings – Also use an *en* dash in keyword headings (like here), to set the keywords apart from the text. When using it in this context, put spaces on either side.

Other marks of punctuation

Exclamation marks (!)

You hardly ever need to use exclamation marks in business writing, except perhaps in personal correspondence to friends. Not even in copy writing!

Example

Our firm has many years of experience! (**Shouting**)

Our firm has many years of experience. (**Better**)

Ellipsis (...)

Use an *ellipsis* (three spaced periods) to indicate an omission from a quotation. The ellipsis is not on your keyboard—it's a special character that you must insert into your document. If you insert three periods in a row, your word processor will insert the correct character automatically.

Example

She instructed, "When you omit words in quoted material, use a series of three spaced periods, called an *ellipsis*, to indicate the omission."

She instructed, "When you omit words in quoted material, use a series of three spaced periods…to indicate the omission."

Brackets [ ]

Use brackets to indicate that you have substituted your own words in a quotation to suit your context.

Example

Our investigation indicates that Bob Smith Contracting was negligent.

Our investigation indicates that [the contractor] was negligent.

Slash (/)

Don't use a slash to indicate an "either/or" choice (for example, "he/she," "employees/contractors") or to replace "and" (for example, "close/lock the door"). Use either "and" or "or," whichever is appropriate.

Use a slash to express a combination—for example, "employer/employee relationship," "on/off switch."

Exercise 27: Punctuate the following

As an experiment take any randomly selected paragraph and copy it making no changes other than removing all punctuation marks you probably will find it confusing with sentences and thoughts running together without any indication of where to stop and pause the absence of punctuation marks leaves you with no clue for your inflections and without inflections the string of words is meaningless you must separate words group them before they make sense to bring order out of chaos is to separate separating is the first step toward understanding and the first function of punctuation marks is to serve as separators

Exercise 28: Punctuate this

Try to punctuate the following line of words—when punctuated correctly, it makes perfect sense:

That that is is that that is not is not is that it it is

Why English is hard to learn

Some reasons why English is hard to learn:

- The bandage was wound around the wound.
- The farm was used to produce produce.
- The dump was so full it had to refuse more refuse.
- We must polish the Polish furniture.
- He could lead if he would get the lead out.
- The soldier decided to desert his dessert in the desert.
- Since there is no time like the present, he thought it was time to present the present.
- A bass and a bass were painted on the base of the bass drum.
- When shot at, the dove dove into the bushes.
- The insurance was invalid for the invalid.
- There was a row among the oarsmen about how to row.
- They were too close to the door to close it.
- The buck does funny things when the does are present.
- A seamstress and a sewer fell down into a sewer.
- The wind was too strong to wind the sail.
- After a number of injections my jaw got number.
- Upon seeing the tear in the painting I shed a tear.
- I had to subject the subject to a series of tests.
- How can I intimate this to my most intimate friend?

MODULE 7

Designing Effective Pages

Good page and screen design not only enhances the visual appeal of your writing, but improves its legibility—readers will be able to locate information on the page faster using skimming and scanning techniques, and once they start to read, will read the text faster.

Many of the page design and typographic conventions that we see in business publications today evolved because of the limitations imposed by typewriters. One example is the use of Courier, a non-proportional typeface. With Courier, every letter and character on the keyboard uses the same amount of space, whether it's an "l" or an "m." While it made the typewriter easier to design, it's considered slower to read because of the unnatural word lengths that result. Now that we use word processors and laser printers, we can drop some of these typewriter conventions and go back to standard typographic conventions.

In this module, you'll learn how to create a great page design, what typefaces work the best, how to highlight for emphasis, what information headers and footers should contain, how to present information graphically, and ways to get the most from your word processor.

Real Resume Bloopers

"Insufficient writing skills, thought processes have slowed down some. If I am not one of the best, I will look for another opportunity."

"My intensity and focus are at inordinately high levels, and my ability to complete projects on time is unspeakable."

Page design and layout

An attractive and legible page design will encourage your readers to use your document, and will make it easier to find information and faster to read.

Line length

Keep your line lengths short. If you use the full width of the page with one-inch margins, you'll have 6.5-inch-long lines—too long for comfortable reading. Instead, use only the right-hand two-thirds of the page like the sample on the right, or use two columns like this workbook. Think about the width of columns in the newspaper—most are about two inches wide.

Typefaces and type sizes

The two main classes of typefaces are *serif* typefaces and *sans serif* typefaces. Most typefaces clearly belong in one class or the other. Serifs are the small extensions at the ends of letters and are widely believed to make them more legible, and the text faster to read.

Serif: Times Roman
Sans serif: Arial

While you probably have many typefaces to choose from, most business documents use only two typefaces: a serif typeface, such as Times Roman, for the text, and a sans serif typeface, such as Arial, for headings. This workbook uses these typefaces in this way.

Most people using Microsoft Windows simply select from the TrueType typefaces that were installed when they installed Windows. TrueType typefaces have both printer and display fonts so that what you see on the screen is virtually identical to what you get from the laser printer. As well, if others print out the file on different laser printers, they'll get the same typefaces as long as they installed the TrueType typefaces when they installed Windows.

Examples of TrueType typefaces	
Serif:	**Sans serif:**
Bookman	Avant Garde
Century Schoolbook	Century Gothic
Courier	Impact
Garamond	News Gothic

The normal type size for text is from 10 points to 12 points. This is the size your readers are most comfortable reading, and therefore they'll read it the fastest. If you are writing for the visually challenged, younger readers, or where the text may be read at a distance, you may need to increase the type size of the text to 13 points or 14 points. Type smaller than 10 points is much harder to read and noticeably slows down readers.

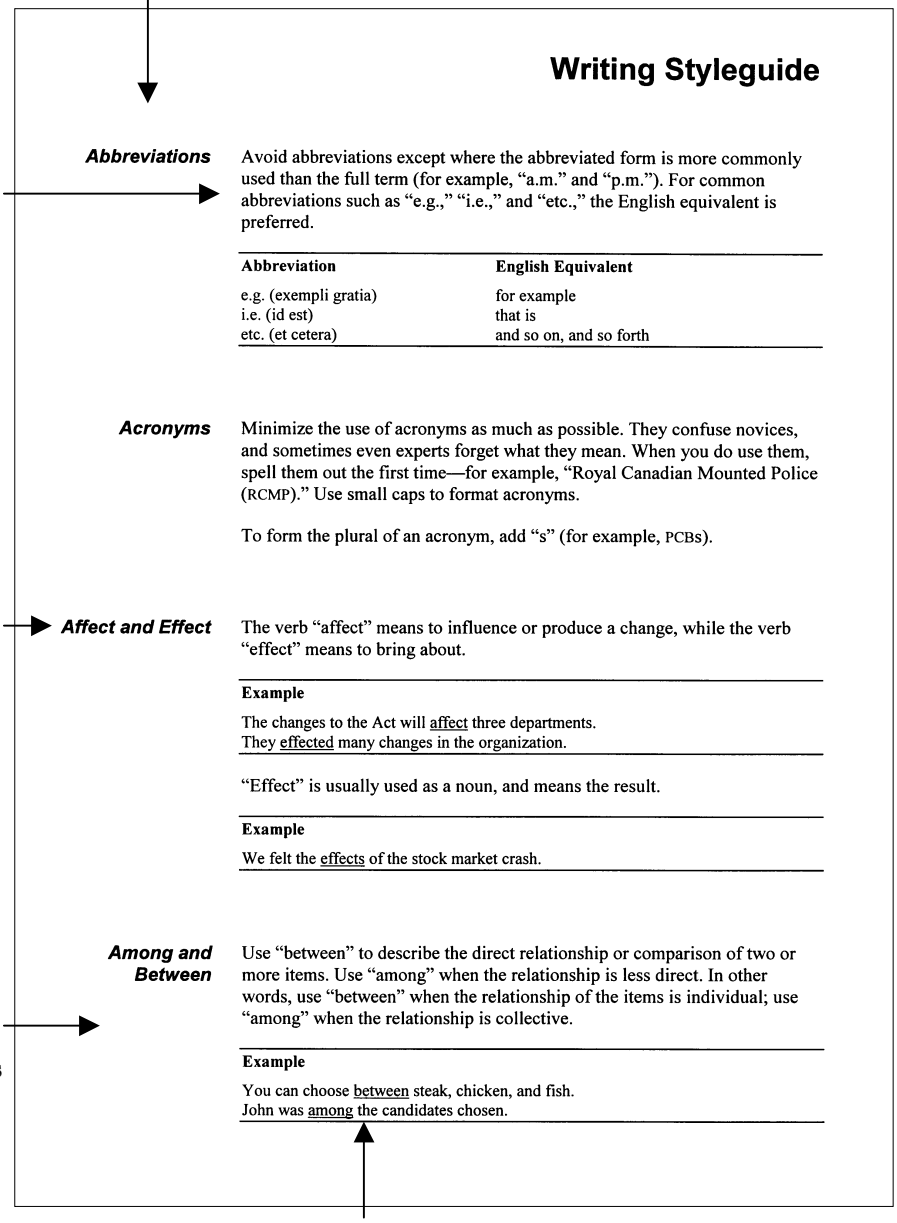
Sans serif typefaces work well for headings because they stand out. Bold for emphasis.

Use a 10-point to 12-point serif typeface like Times New Roman for easy reading.

Use plenty of headings to break up text. Two or three per page is typical.

Use lots of white space to make the page reader friendly and to let headings stand out. Solid text intimidates readers.

End the page at an appropriate spot. Don't leave single lines.



Writing Styleguide

Abbreviations

Avoid abbreviations except where the abbreviated form is more commonly used than the full term (for example, "a.m." and "p.m."). For common abbreviations such as "e.g.," "i.e.," and "etc.," the English equivalent is preferred.

Abbreviation	English Equivalent
e.g. (exempli gratia)	for example
i.e. (id est)	that is
etc. (et cetera)	and so on, and so forth

Acronyms

Minimize the use of acronyms as much as possible. They confuse novices, and sometimes even experts forget what they mean. When you do use them, spell them out the first time—for example, "Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP)." Use small caps to format acronyms.

To form the plural of an acronym, add "s" (for example, PCBs).

Affect and Effect

The verb "affect" means to influence or produce a change, while the verb "effect" means to bring about.

Example

The changes to the Act will affect three departments.
They effected many changes in the organization.

"Effect" is usually used as a noun, and means the result.

Example

We felt the effects of the stock market crash.

Among and Between

Use "between" to describe the direct relationship or comparison of two or more items. Use "among" when the relationship is less direct. In other words, use "between" when the relationship of the items is individual; use "among" when the relationship is collective.

Example

You can choose between steak, chicken, and fish.
John was among the candidates chosen.

Highlighting for emphasis

If you want to emphasize certain words or passages, you can use **bolding**, notes, *italics*, underlining, UPPER CASE, or SMALL CAPS. But use these effects sparingly—they all slow reading speed if used for more than a few words.

Bolding – Normally used to emphasize headings. Avoid using to emphasize key points—if you photocopy the text, you may lose the bolded effect. Instead, make it into a note.

> ***Note*** – Make a note for key information that needs to be emphasized, particularly if it's more than a word or two. Enclosing it in a box draws the reader's eyes.

Italics – Normally used to identify emphasized or new words. We've used italics in this workbook to introduce new terms or identify terms that are being defined. Italics can also be used for document titles, such as the title of a form or publication.

Underlining – Commonly used when working with typewriters, but not used much anymore. Avoid underlining.

UPPER CASE – Often used with typewriters for headings because of the lack of other available heading attributes. All-upper-case letters, however, slow reading speed because of the loss of characteristic word shapes—words in mixed case have a shape that aids in their recognition. Avoid using all-upper-case headings, except for acronyms and abbreviations.

SMALL CAPS – If acronyms and abbreviations are set in full capital letters like this—SPCA—they are too dominant and will jump out visually. It's better to put them in *small caps* like this—SPCA (usually two points smaller than the text) to give them about the same visual dominance as other words in the text.

Headings

When deciding on the typeface and size of headings in your document, make sure that the reader will be able to easily distinguish one level from another. Look at the headings in this book. The first-level headings (the module headings) are 36-point Eras Medium, flush left. The second-level headings (the section headings) are 24-point Eras Medium, flush left. The third-level headings are 14-point Eras Medium, also flush left.

When determining the attributes of your heading levels, make sure:

- the size runs from biggest to smallest as you descend the hierarchy
- at least three points of type size separate each level of heading, for example, 18 points, 15 points, and 12 points (otherwise readers may be unsure of what level they're looking at)
- the typeface runs from boldest to lightest as you descend the hierarchy

Keyword headings – We've used another type of heading in this book that we call *keyword headings* (like here). They are not fifth-level headings because they can be used at any level in the hierarchy.

On the Web, the user's browser often determines the typeface and type size of each heading level found in a file. Each of the major browsers has a default, but these can be reset by the user.

For more information about headings, also see *Design a hierarchy*, page 27.

Line spacing

Leave the line spacing set at the default on your word processor. This is the setting considered to be the most readable. Increasing the line spacing, or *leading*, will give the text a more spacious or relaxed look, and is often used in magazine and book publishing. Decreasing the line spacing will make the text more difficult to read.

Use extra line spacing to separate paragraphs. Avoid indenting the first line of a paragraph—this convention is not commonly used in business publications. Additional line spacing is often used to set off headings from the text above and below them. Look at the spacing above and below headings in this workbook.

Justification

Justification refers to how the lines of text line up at the left and right margins. All text is left justified—all lines start at the left margin. But text can also be fully justified—lines can line up at the right margin as well. This paragraph is fully justified. Magazines and newspapers are almost always fully justified, but business documents are usually not.

Fully justifying text often results in awkward word spacing, which affects reading speed. Magazines and newspapers can often avoid some of these problems by hyphenating words, or using sophisticated typesetting equipment to automatically *kern* words on a line (kerning refers to adjusting the letter spacing of words).

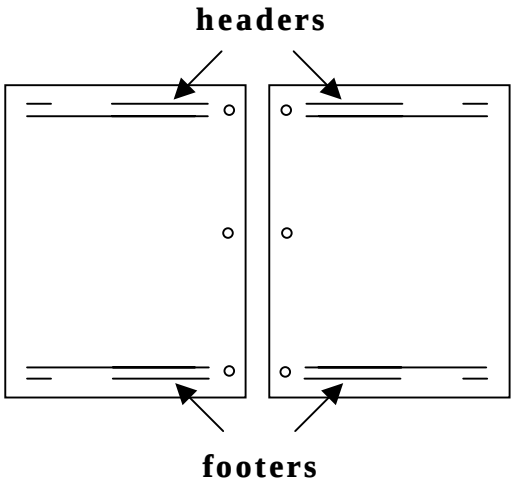
Since most word processors can't kern in the same way, and hyphenating words slows reading speed, avoid fully justifying text.

A *ragged-right* margin makes it easier for the reader's eyes to move from line to line. Most of the paragraphs in this workbook, including this one, are left justified and have ragged-right margins.

Headers and footers

Headers are the information and graphics at the top of the page that are not part of the text. *Footers* are the information and graphics at the bottom of the page. Headers and footers are normally only used on longer documents, such as reports or manuals.

Normally there are two different headers and footers—one for left pages and one for right pages—with different information or graphics.



Headers and footers contain important *page control* information, which tells readers where they are and provides other important information about the document they're reading.

The following information may be part of headers and footers:

- organization name and logo
- graphic lines (usually to separate the header and footer from the text)
- document title
- section title
- page number
- issue date
- name of author
- contact department or name
- word processor folder path and file name

Page numbers are usually on the outside edge of the page so they can be seen easily. For documents that are to be printed double sided, the numbers will be on the right on right-hand pages and on the left on left-hand pages.

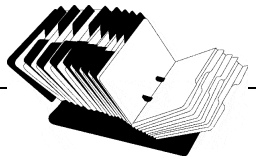
Incidentally, right-hand pages always have odd page numbers and left-hand pages always have even page numbers—this is a universal typographic convention.

Page breaks

Page break refers to where you end a page of text. The standard rule is to never leave a single line of text at either the bottom of a page (an *orphan*) or the top of a page (a *widow*). Most word processors have a *widow and orphan* feature, which automatically guards against single lines. However, for documents that typically use lots of headings, bullet lists, and other methods of presentation, this feature doesn't work well. Once the text is finalized, go through the document and decide where the pages should break.

Follow these guidelines for page breaks:

- Don't separate headings from the text that follows.
- Avoid leaving major headings close to the bottom of the page.
- Don't separate introductory lines from the lists they introduce.
- Don't separate tables from their titles.
- Leave at least two lines of a paragraph at the top and bottom of a page.



Using graphics

Different types of information lend themselves to different methods of presentation. By using the most appropriate methods of presentation, you will help readers find and understand the information they need faster and more easily.

Methods of presenting information

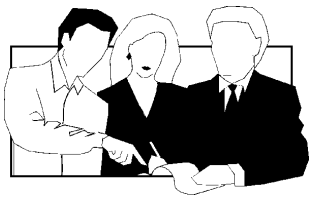
- bullet lists
- checklists
- text boxes
- sidebar text
- tables
- step-by-step procedures
- flow diagrams
- decision trees
- form illustrations
- screen illustrations
- technical illustrations
- photographs
- graphics
- icons

Information is most commonly presented in *narrative* form (paragraph after paragraph). Although narrative text forms most of what we read and is a necessary part of most business documents, it's more difficult to scan for information than most other presentation methods.

Good documents use a variety of methods of presenting information. The result, instead of narrative text, is termed *structured text*. When you prepare documents, think of yourself as a communicator, not a writer—don't automatically write paragraph after paragraph.

Non-technical graphics can be used to provide visual interest, but graphics should relate to and reinforce the theme of the text. Graphics should always be placed as closely following their reference in the text as possible.

You can get many kinds of graphics from clip-art sources. Try and use graphics created in a similar style.

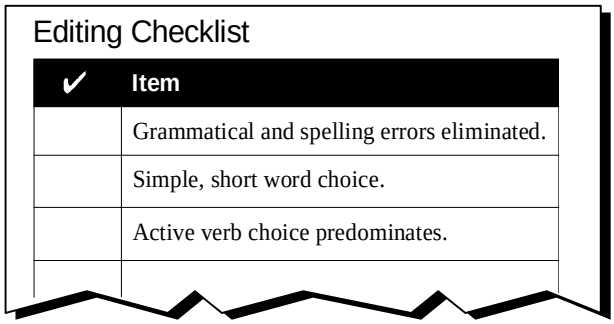


More complex graphics, or graphics on specific subjects, can be custom-developed by graphic artists.

Tips on using graphics:

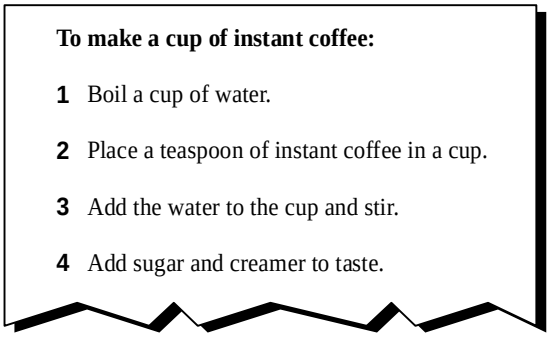
- Use graphics to visually enhance the document and break up the text. Always choose graphics that reinforce the message of the text.
- If using graphics of people, make sure you use images of both sexes and different ethnic groups.
- When you're using a scanner, adjust the size of the graphic when you're scanning, not after when you are placing the graphic in your word processor.

Here are some examples of a checklist, a step-by-step procedure, and an If…Then table.



Editing Checklist

✔	Item
	Grammatical and spelling errors eliminated.
	Simple, short word choice.
	Active verb choice predominates.



To make a cup of instant coffee:

1. Boil a cup of water.
2. Place a teaspoon of instant coffee in a cup.
3. Add the water to the cup and stir.
4. Add sugar and creamer to taste.

If…	Then…
The information consists of conditions and actions	Use an If…Then…table
The information consists of rows and columns of tabular data	Use a standard table
The information consists of problems and solutions	Use a troubleshooting table

Using your word processor

Most organizations use word processing software rather than desktop publishing software to prepare their documents. While desktop publishing software is excellent for complex page layouts, you'll find that its focus on the page rather than the document increases the amount of work required to revise a document.

The most commonly used word processing programs for personal computers are Microsoft Word and Corel WordPerfect. These programs offer all the features required to produce most documents.

Word processors provide writers with great flexibility. Before the word processor, writers had to write in a basically linear flow, completing one idea or sentence before beginning the next one. After all, it wasn't easy to rearrange sentences. With a word processor, you can write as you please. You can leave an idea unfinished and go on to another idea. Or you can skip around, writing different ideas as thoughts occur to you. You can write the concluding paragraph first and the introductory paragraph last. And when you're finished, you can shuffle the paragraphs around. Take advantage of this flexibility when you write.

While writing with a word processor is easy, page layout and formatting can be tricky. If you find yourself spending a lot of time trying to get the page to look right, consider having someone else format it. If you've got someone with strong word processing skills, that person can probably lay out the pages faster and with fewer mistakes than you can.

Tips for faster and better word processing:

- Use your word processor the way it was designed to be used—fudged work-arounds can take more time in the end.
- Create a document template to speed formatting and ensure consistency.
- Use the styles feature (don't apply formatting directly to elements of the text). It's faster and way easier to change.
- Learn to touch type, if you don't know how to already—you should be able to type faster than you can think.
- Use understandable file names for your documents, and place them in appropriate folders so you can find them.
- Save your document regularly.
- If you run into problems, look in your manual or help system.

Some tips for proper English

- Avoid alliteration. Always.
- Never use a long word when a diminutive one will do.
- Employ the vernacular.
- Eschew ampersands and abbreviations, etc.
- Parenthetical remarks (however relevant) are unnecessary.
- Remember to never split an infinitive.
- Foreign words and phrases are not apropos.
- One should never generalize.
- Eliminate quotations. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "I hate quotations. Tell me what you know."
- Comparisons are as bad as clichés.
- Don't be redundant; don't use more words than necessary; it's highly superfluous.
- Be more or less specific.
- Understatement is always best.
- One word sentences? Eliminate.
- Analogies in writing are like feathers on a snake.
- The passive voice is to be avoided.
- Go around the barn at high noon to avoid colloquialisms.
- Even if a mixed metaphor sings, it should be derailed.
- Who needs rhetorical questions?
- Exaggeration is a billion times worse than understatement.
- Don't never use a double negation.
- capitalize every sentence and remember always end it with point
- Do not put statements in the negative form.
- Verbs have to agreed with their subjects.
- Proofread carefully to see if you words out.
- If you reread your work, you can find on rereading a great deal of repetition can be avoided by rereading and editing.
- A writer must not shift your point of view.
- Place pronouns as close as possible, especially in long sentences of 10 or more words, to their antecedents.

APPENDIX 1

Answers to Exercises

Here are some suggested answers to the exercises presented in this book. In many of the exercises, there are other possible correct answers.

Exercise 1: Make this sentence more believable

You've reached the offices of A-to-Z Manufacturing. All of our operators are busy at the moment. We value your business—please stay on the line and the next available operator will be with you shortly.

Exercise 2: Add back the missing words

If the oil pressure is under 40 pounds, loosen the right-hand banjo screw.

Exercise 3: Top 10 list of attributes of good business writing

1. Use a conversational style.
2. Use short, everyday words.
3. Use first-person and second-person point of view where appropriate.
4. Use short sentences in subject-verb-object sentence order.
5. Prefer active verbs.
6. Use strong verbs.
7. Be concise.
8. Be gender neutral.
9. Use contractions where appropriate.
10. Avoid slang and clichés.

Exercise 4: Writing tone

Most good business writers strive for the following tones in their writing:

- casual
- courteous
- earnest
- engaging
- forthright
- friendly
- helpful
- honest
- informal
- informative
- objective
- personal
- polite
- sincere

Exercise 5: Identify and profile your audience

Here are 10 things you may want to know about your readers:

1. what they'll do with the information
2. how much they know about the subject
3. their job and work tasks
4. their educational level
5. their reading level
6. whether they're using English as a second language (ESL)
7. where they will be reading the document (for example, in the field)
8. their attitudes about the subject (are they motivated?)
9. their age and gender
10. where they're located (urban or rural)

Exercise 7: Break up this long paragraph

Limit paragraphs to a single topic or idea. If you find yourself covering several topics, you probably need several paragraphs. It's better to have too many paragraphs than too few.

Don't let paragraphs get too long. Most professional writers will average only three or four sentences in a paragraph. Ones that span large areas of the page intimidate readers.

Make sure that the opening sentence introduces or summarizes the content of the paragraph. This type of opening sentence is often referred to as the *topic sentence*. The sentences that follow should flow from the first sentence and provide supporting details.

Organize paragraphs into a logical sequence. This sequence might be broadest to narrowest, most important to least important, or chronological, depending on the nature of the information.

If appropriate, replace paragraphs with bullet lists—they're easier for readers to scan. Avoid including more than three list items in a paragraph. If the items are steps in a procedure, use numbers instead.

Exercise 8: Editing challenge

If you don't have a professional editor available, your best writer will have to do. Or consider contracting the services of a professional editor—an editor's services can be worth their weight in gold. Writers should not edit their own writing, because they are often blind to their own errors. After an edit, the editor and writer should review the changes together. This will help the writer understand the reasons behind the changes. A styleguide should be used to sort out differences of opinion.

Exercise 9: Calculate the fog index

Sample 1

	20	Average words in sentence (100 words, 5 sentences)
+	17	% of hard words (17 hard words)
=	37	Subtotal
x	0.4	Magic multiplier
=	**14.8**	Required reading level

Sample 2

	13.4	Average words in sentence (67 words, 5 sentences)
+	16.42	% of hard words (11 hard words)
=	29.82	Subtotal
x	0.4	Magic multiplier
=	**11.92**	Required reading level

Exercise 10: Put "I" and "we" in your writing

1. We made errors in processing the payroll.
2. I had to edit and convert the report to HTML before it could go on the intranet.
3. The arbitration was not going well so we called in the best negotiator.

Exercise 11: Put "you" in your writing

1. Before you complete the report, check the cross-references for accuracy.
2. You must give staff enough time to review the document.
3. You can't easily modify the annual report once it has been printed.
4. Analyzing the information needs of staff may let you change the way you distribute manuals.

Exercise 12: Shorten long sentences

Divide the following compound sentences at the slash (/). Note the words that follow—but, and, yet, however, although. These are *conjunctions*, which are used to join ideas together. Avoid using them to join independent clauses together.

We are prepared to cooperate with your consultants in the preparation of a schedule,/ **but** we insist on maintaining complete control of the work as outlined in Article 12 of the General Conditions of the Contract/ **and** any such schedule must be prepared in a manner and form suitable to use as a tool and guide to management for all construction operations on the site.

The facts clearly indicate that motor cars with faulty brakes are being driven on our streets and highways/ **yet** government officials have not taken action to protect the responsible motorist and the general public.

The shipping clerk may have only a vague notion of what happens to the four copies of the bill of lading forwarded to the sales order and billing departments;/ **however**, this will not affect the clerk's ability to assess a proposed recommendation about internal control.

We find the division of business into accounting systems a convenient structure for evaluating internal control,/ **although** management may view its business differently, perhaps in terms of areas of functional responsibilities.

Exercise 13: Break up very long sentences

Our proposal indicates the general approach we would take if we were awarded the contract to write and produce the annual report. However, it does not specifically address the time and costs that would be required to complete the project. Not enough substantive information was provided in the request for proposal that was sent to us on January 2.

Exercise 14: Use everyday words

- the start date is August 1
- we will have to pay you
- the method is under review
- they used the photocopier
- she got the forms
- they found that
- he knew that
- after our meeting
- she said yes
- it cost about $50

Exercise 15: Use active verbs

The committee has not selected an option.

The appendix lists error messages.

I discovered omissions when I word processed the report. (You have to provide the subject since it was missing from the sentence.)

We did not intend to disrupt service during the transition. (Again, you have to provide the subject.)

Exercise 16: Avoid weak verbs

Instead of...	**Use...**
give an answer to	answer
reach a conclusion	conclude
do an inspection	inspect
raise an objection	object
send an invitation to	invite
provide a solution	solve
form a plan	plan
conduct an analysis	analyze
make a distinction	distinguish
have knowledge of	know
make a proposal	propose
hold a meeting	meet

Exercise 17: Make the last three items parallel to the first

The plan is deficient because:

- the budget was not prepared
- two major cost items were not identified
- staffing was not approved
- other errors were made

Exercise 18: "Which" and "that"

The manager plans to take us to the new Thai restaurant, which is in our old office building.

Penticton, which lies within the Okanagan Valley, is shown on the attached map.

The proposal that we liked best was from Acme Printing and Binding.

The committee reviewed the best plans that were submitted.

We could not find the digital file that was missing.

Exercise 19: Rewrite the following noun and modifier strings so their meaning is clear

It's not possible to identify the correct meaning of these phrases because they all have several possible meanings. That's the point of this exercise.

Exercise 20: Revise these sentences to replace the general and the inexact with the exact and the concrete

Mud the gyproc with a 3-millilitre layer of filler, then wait for 2 hours before sanding.

To ensure that the deadline can be met, the draft must be finished by 10:00 a.m. Monday.

The accounting group was unable to connect to the server.

Tighten the bolt to a torque wrench setting of 125 pounds.

Only equipment and payroll expenditures are permitted.

Report any transactions of more than $10,000.

Exercise 21: Replace the following clichés with everyday words	
please feel free to call	call
between a rock and hard place	difficult situation
in connection with	about
with regard to	about
six of one, half a dozen of the other	the same
with respect to	about
easier said than done	difficult
as already stated	(omit)
pursuant to your letter	about your letter
all things considered	after considering
enclosed herewith is	I've enclosed
to say the least	(omit)
to explore every avenue	explore all options
in the neighbourhood of	about
to a certain extent	partially
as a matter of fact	(omit)
suffice it to say	(omit)
hit the nail on the head	you're correct
the fact of the matter is	it is
we beg to acknowledge	we acknowledge
avoid clichés like the plague	avoid clichés

Exercise 22: What do these foreign words and phrases mean?	
pro bono	for free
gratis	for free
ipso facto	thereby
c'est la vie	that's life
tout fini	all finished
savoir faire	know how
je ne sais quoi	indefinable something

Exercise 23: What Latin words do these abbreviations stand for?

e.g.	exempli gratia
i.e.	id est
etc.	et cetera

Exercise 24: Translate these numbers

IX	9
M	1,000
CM	900
XC	90
MCMXCIX	1999
MM	2,000

Exercise 25: List 10 types of things that should be capitalized

- personal names
- organization names
- document titles
- form titles
- department names
- position titles
- months of the year
- days of the week
- provinces
- states
- cities
- political parties
- planets and heavenly bodies
- some acronyms and abbreviations

Exercise 26: Should these be capitalized?

- Audit of Financial and Management Practices
- Kootenay Regional District
- the regional district (referring to above)
- district management staff
- the Transportation of Dangerous Goods Act
- the Act (or act)
- Lower Mainland
- Greater Vancouver
- northwestern British Columbia
- we audited three ministries
- the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia
- the Corporation (or corporation)
- the Board (or board) heard three submissions
- the Manager, Human Resources
- the manager of human resources

Exercise 27: Punctuate the following

As an experiment, take any randomly selected paragraph and copy it, making no changes other than removing all punctuation marks. You probably will find it confusing with sentences and thoughts running together without any indication of where to stop and pause. The absence of punctuation marks leaves you with no clue for your inflections, and without inflections the string of words is meaningless. You must separate words—group them—before they make sense. To bring order out of chaos is to separate. Separating is the first step toward understanding, and the first function of punctuation marks is to serve as separators.

Exercise 28: Punctuate this

That that is, is; that that is not, is not. Is that it? It is!

APPENDIX 2

Writing Styleguide

Abbreviations

Avoid abbreviations except where the abbreviated form is more commonly used than the full term (for example, "a.m." and "p.m."). For common abbreviations such as "e.g.," "i.e.," and "etc.," use English equivalents.

Abbreviation	English equivalent
e.g. (exempli gratia)	for example
i.e. (id est)	that is
etc. (et cetera)	and so on, and so forth

If you choose to use these abbreviations, use lower case and separate the abbreviation from the following text with a comma (e.g., like this).

Acronyms

Minimize the use of acronyms as much as possible. They confuse novices, and sometimes even experts forget what they mean. When you do use them, spell them out the first time—for example, "Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP)." Use small caps to format acronyms.

To form the plural of an acronym, add "s" (for example, PCBs).

Affect and effect

The verb "affect" means to influence or produce a change, while the verb "effect" means to bring about.

Example

The changes to the Act will affect three departments.

They effected many changes in the organization.

"Effect" is usually used as a noun, and means the result.

Example

We felt the effects of the stock market crash.

Among and between

Use "between" to describe the direct relationship or comparison of two or more items. Use "among" when the relationship is less direct. In other words, use "between" when the relationship of the items is individual; use "among" when the relationship is collective.

Example

You can choose between steak, chicken, and fish.

John was among the candidates chosen.

And/or

"And/or" is often used in legal applications. Avoid using it where either "and" or "or" will do.

Because and since

Avoid using "since" to mean "because"—it's ambiguous. Use "because" to refer to a reason. Use "since" to refer to the passage of time.

Example

Because we installed a new system, we can quickly respond to the public.

Since we installed the new system, our response rate has improved by five minutes.

Between

See *Among and between*.

Can and may

Use "can" to describe actions or conditions that are possible. Use "may" only to describe situations where permission is being given. If either "can," "could," or "may" apply, use "can" because it's less tentative.

Example

You can submit the form upon completion. (**Correct**)

You may submit the form upon completion. (**Implies that you have permission to submit the report**)

Use "may" only when you really need to be tentative.

Example

If you submit the form within two weeks, you may receive approval faster.

Clichés

A *cliché* is an expression that has lost its originality and impact through overuse. Examples of clichés include "busy as a bee," "light as a feather," "with regard to" and "all things considered." Avoid clichés "like the plague!"

Colloquialisms

Colloquialisms are conversational or slang expressions like "cutting-edge technology." Avoid them as much as possible.

If the slang expression is acceptable, don't enclose it in single quotation marks—just use it. If the expression is not acceptable, avoid it altogether.

Example

It was 'cutting-edge' technology. (**Avoid**)

It was cutting-edge technology. (**Preferred**)

Comprise

"Comprise" means to include or maintain. The whole comprises the parts rather than the reverse. Never use "comprised of."

Example

The department comprises several workgroups. (**Correct**)

Several workgroups comprise the department. (**Incorrect**)

The department is comprised of several workgroups. (**Incorrect**)

Contractions

Contractions are contracted forms of words with the missing letters represented with an apostrophe, such as "you'll" and "don't." They give your writing a more conversational tone—to the reader they sound more like natural speech.

Contractions are widely used in most business writing. Because they are a mark of informal writing, you may want to avoid them in formal documents.

Be consistent in substituting an apostrophe for deleted letters. Avoid uncommon contractions, and don't create any new ones of your own.

Don't use a contraction with a noun to replace "is" (for example, "our network's connected"). Don't make a contraction from a noun and a verb (for example, "the supervisor'll review your work").

Dates

Avoid using abbreviations for months. Don't use "th" or "nd" after a date. Only use a comma when the day is included.

Example

Nov. 10th, 1997 (**Avoid**)

November 10, 1997 (**Preferred**)

November 1997 (**Preferred**)

Desire, wish, need, and want

Use "need" instead of "desire" and "wish." Use "want" when the reader's actions are optional (that is, they may not "need" something but may still "want" something).

Example

If you need to confirm receipt of your application, call the branch office.

Select the books you want and sign them out in the register.

Different

Use "different from" rather than "different than" when the next part of the sentence is a noun or pronoun (that is, two things are being compared).

Example

Form 123 is different from Form 124.

Effect

See *Affect and effect*.

Ensure and insure

"Ensure" means to make sure. "Insure" refers to insurance.

Example

Ensure that the applicant has completed the necessary forms before continuing.

You can insure your house up to its market value.

Fractions

Express fractions in words or as decimals whenever possible. When you do use fractions, use figures for fractions greater than one (for example, "0.25 litres," "3.3 metres," "2½ days"). Spell out fractions less than one that are used alone (for example, "one-third inch," "three-quarters finished"). But use figures when fractions are part of a compound term (for example, "¼-inch bolt").

Gender inclusiveness

Avoid specifying gender. Here are some guidelines:

- Use gender-neutral titles when referring to people (for example, use "chairperson" or "chair" instead of "chairman"). Use generic nouns when referring to specific groups (for example, use "managers" to include both male and female managers).
- Avoid gender-specific pronouns (for example, "his," "her," "he/she"). You can:
  - address the reader as "you"
  - repeat the noun (for example, "managers")
  - drop the pronoun altogether
  - make the noun plural and then use "they" or "their," which are gender neutral
  - use a passive verb and omit the noun and pronoun
  - rewrite the sentence
- Avoid phrases that make assumptions about gender. For example, "delegates and their wives are invited to attend the breakfast meeting" implies that all delegates are male.
- Avoid always putting men first in phrases such as "men and women," "boys and girls," "his or hers." Alternate the word order in phrases like these, so that neither women nor men always go first.

- Avoid using language that is not parallel, such as "men and ladies" (use "men and women"/"women and men"), "man and wife" (use "husband and wife"/"wife and husband"), and "Mr. and Mrs. John Doe" (use "Mr. John Doe and Mrs. Jane Doe" or "Jane and John Doe").
- Never refer to adult women as "girls," "gals," or "ladies" in situations where you would call men "men."
- Don't use "lady," "woman," or "female" as adjectives (for example, "lady doctor," "woman lawyer") unless gender is relevant. If gender is relevant, use the noun "woman" (for example, "she is the first woman to walk on the moon") or the adjective "female" (for example, "she is the first female astronaut to walk on the moon").
- Avoid stereotypical words and phrases (for example, "like a man," "women's work," and "ladylike").

Insure

See *Ensure and insure*.

Italics

Use *italics* when referring to document titles and section references and when introducing new terms.

Its and it's

Use "it's" as a contraction for "it is" (for example, "it's the right thing to do"). Use "its" as a possessive pronoun (for example, "the store is known for its low prices").

Me, myself, and I

Use the pronoun "I" as a subject. Use "me" as an object. Use "myself" when the person receiving the action is the same as the person doing the action.

Examples

John and me share the computer. (**Incorrect**)

John and I share the computer. (**Correct**)

It was a valuable experience for her friend and I. (**Incorrect**)

It was a valuable experience for her friend and me. (**Correct**)

I cut myself. (**Correct**)

The waiter gave my sister and myself some good tips. (**Incorrect**)

The waiter gave my sister and me some good tips. (**Correct**)

Measurements

When writing for a Canadian audience, express measurements in metric, unless imperial or some other measurement is conventionally used (for example, "5 feet 11 inches tall").

Follow these conventions for describing measurements:

- Use figures for all measurements—even if the number is under 10 (for example, 5 metres).
- Spell out the names of metric units (for example, "25 grams"). Use symbols (for example, "25 g") only in tables.
- For two or more measurements, repeat the unit of measure (for example, "3.5-inch or 5.25-inch disk").
- When the measurement is used as an adjective, use a hyphen to connect the number to the measurement unit (for example, "2-inch binder").
- Express dimensions in figures (for example, "3.5 inches by 10 inches").

See also *Fractions and numbers*.

Money

Don't add a decimal point or zeros to a whole dollar amount in a sentence.

Example

The first option costs $1.50, the second costs $2.00, and the third costs 75¢. (**Avoid**)

The first option costs $1.50, the second costs $2, and the third costs $0.75. (**Preferred**).

Note that amounts less than $1 are expressed as "$0.75," not as "75¢."

In a column, if any amount contains cents, add a decimal point and two zeros to all whole dollar amounts.

Myself

See *Me, myself, and I*.

Names

Be consistent when naming organizations, position titles, document titles, and so on. Capitalize names and use them consistently throughout the document.

Need

See *Desire, wish, need, and want*.

Notes

Note: To draw the reader's attention to something of special importance, create a note like this one.

Paragraphs

Keep paragraphs short—no longer than four or five sentences if you can. Longer paragraphs are visually intimidating to the reader.

Try to limit each paragraph to one topic, unless you are linking related points. Start a new paragraph when you change topics or shift your focus.

Leave a space between paragraphs. Avoid indenting the first line of a paragraph—this convention is not commonly used in business publications.

Parallelism

If two or more ideas are parallel, express them in parallel form. Balance single words with single words, phrases with phrases, clauses with clauses.

Example

Frequent absences can result in suspension or even being terminated. (**Not parallel**)

Frequent absences can result in suspension or even termination. (**Parallel**)

Balance parallel ideas in a series or items in a list.

Examples

The department is responsible for creating annual reports, budgets, and financial planning. (**Not parallel**)

The department is responsible for creating annual reports, budgets, and financial plans. (**Parallel**)

White space is important for the following reasons:

- breaks up visual impact
- visual separation of sections (**Not parallel**)
- visually separates sections (**Parallel**)
- focusing attention (**Not parallel**)
- focuses attention (**Parallel**)
- content is broken into smaller chunks (**Not parallel**)
- breaks content into smaller chunks (**Parallel**)

Passive voice

See *Voice*.

Percent (%)

Spell out the word percent. Use the symbol in tables, on business forms, and in statistical or technical information. Be consistent—don't mix the word percent and the symbol %. In sentences that begin with a percentage, spell the number out.

Example

Price reductions range from 20 to 50 percent.

Forty percent of the population...

Person

Person refers to the point of view or perspective you take when writing: first person ("I" or "we"), second person ("you"), or third person ("he," "she," or "they"). This styleguide is written in the second person, because it addresses the reader as "you."

Singular and plural forms of personal pronouns

Person	Singular	Plural
first	I, me, my, mine	we, us, our, ours
second	you, your, yours	you, your, yours
third	he, him, his she, her, hers it, its	they, them, their, theirs

Use the "I" or "we" point of view, which emphasizes the writer, when writing correspondence or reports about personal experience—for example, when describing your group's actions or ideas.

Example

We have decided not to upgrade our computer system.

Use the "you" point of view, which emphasizes the reader, when giving advice or instructions. For example, when writing a procedure manual, use the second person and the imperative form (that is, tell the reader what to do).

Example

Complete the form, then submit it to your supervisor.

Use the third person, which emphasizes the subject, when describing what other people have done or should do.

Example

Writers should decide on a point of view and stick with it.

Point of view

See *Person*.

Possessives and plurals

Form the possessive case of singular nouns by adding an apostrophe and an "s"—even if the word ends in an "s."

Example

- the Ministry's responsibility
- Burns's poetry

For plural nouns ending in "s," form the possessive case by adding an apostrophe.

Examples

- Workers' Compensation Board
- ministries' budgets

For plural nouns not ending in "s," form the possessive case by adding an apostrophe and an "s."

Examples

- children's stories
- women's programs

Instead of using old-fashioned Latin-style plurals, use English-style plurals. The Latin-style plurals are not wrong, just a bit stuffy.

Old-fashioned	Preferred
formulae	formulas
appendices	appendixes
addenda	addendums
indices	indexes

Prepositions

A preposition links a noun or pronoun to another word or phrase. Prepositions often express relationships—for example, "with," "to," "since," "at," and so on.

Although some writers avoid dangling prepositions, sometimes they help avoid awkward sentence constructions.

Example

Where are you going to? (**Considered incorrect by some**)

To where are you going? (**Awkward**)

Where are you going? (**Better**)

Presently

Avoid using "presently" as it's often taken to mean "now" rather than its actual meaning "soon."

Pronouns

A *pronoun* is a word that represents a noun—for example, "he," "it," "who," "they," and so on. The noun a pronoun represents is its *antecedent*.

Use pronouns sparingly. When used too often or incorrectly, they can be ambiguous and can slow reading speed because the reader has to go back to see which noun they represent.

Make sure pronouns agree with their antecedents. If pronoun references are not clear, repeat the noun or restructure the sentence.

Examples

Thank the writer for their interest. (**Incorrect**)

Thank the writer for her interest. (**Correct**)

Thank the writers for their interest. (**Correct**)

If you drop the plate on the glass table, it might break. (**Ambiguous**)

If you drop the plate on the glass table, the plate might break. (**Clear**)

If you drop the plate on the glass table, the table might break. (**Clear**)

The plate might break if you drop it on the glass table. (**Clear**)

See also *Gender inclusiveness*.

Sentences

Keep sentences short and simple. Try to limit them to one idea. The longer the sentence, the more difficult it is to grasp. If it's longer than 30 words, consider rewriting it. Don't link unrelated ideas together with "and" or use semicolons.

Structure your sentences using a simple subject-verb-object sentence order. By sticking to this order, you avoid using the passive voice, use fewer words, and your sentence is easier to understand.

Example

Applicants (**subject**) appreciate (**verb**) honesty (**object**).

Try not to start sentences with "it" and "there"—these constructions are often vague and wordy, and can usually be restructured to be much more direct.

Examples

It was not our intention to break the rules. (**Avoid**)

We did not intend to break the rules. (**Preferred**)

There may be resistance to the plan. (**Avoid**)

Some people may resist the plan. (**Preferred**)

There are several options in this proposal. (**Avoid**)

This proposal presents several options. (**Preferred**)

Spacing after a period – Use a single space to separate the end of one sentence from the beginning of the next. Word processors automatically put in the required spacing at the end of sentences. Pressing the space bar twice will result in twice the required spacing.

Since

See *Because and since*.

Spacing

Don't use hard spaces (the space produced when you press the space bar) to centre or position text—use tabs, indents, or centred alignment.

Use a single space to separate the end of one sentence from the beginning of the next. As a general rule, you should never have two consecutive spaces in a document.

Spelling and usage

When writing for a Canadian audience, use Canadian, not American, spelling (for example, "colour" not "color," "centre" not "center"). If in doubt, refer to *The Canadian Oxford Dictionary*.

That and which

"That" introduces a restrictive clause—a clause that must be there for the sentence to make sense. A restrictive clause often defines the noun or phrase preceding it. "Which" introduces a non-restrictive, parenthetical clause—a clause that could be omitted without affecting the meaning of the sentence.

Example

The car was travelling at a speed that would endanger lives.

The car, which was travelling at a speed that would endanger lives, swerved onto the sidewalk.

Use "who" or "whom," rather than "that" or "which," when referring to a person.

Their and there

"There" is an adverb used to indicate a place or position other than "here." "Their" is the possessive form of "they." Use the plural pronoun "their" only when the noun it's representing is plural.

Examples

Your manual is over there.

Their manual needs to be updated.

Contact each employee to clarify their options and rights. (**Incorrect**)

Contact all employees to clarify their options and rights. (**Correct**)

Then and than

"Then" refers to a time in the past or the next step in a sequence. "Than" is used for comparisons.

Time

When referring to specific times, use numerals and the abbreviations "a.m." and "p.m." with lower-case letters and periods.

Examples

3:30 p.m.	9:00 a.m.	4:45 p.m.

Underlining

Use underlining sparingly—it slows reading speed. Don't use it to emphasize parts of the text. If something is very important, give it a separate heading, put it in a text box, or create a note (see *Notes*).

Verbs

Use the active voice and strong verbs whenever you can. Make sure the verb agrees with the subject of the sentence.

Voice – Use the active voice whenever possible. Using the active voice helps maintain the preferred subject-verb-object sentence order. You also avoid introducing the auxiliary verb required by passive verb forms.

Example

The form is completed by the applicant. (**Passive voice**)

The applicant completes the form. (**Active voice**)

Tense – Match the different verb tenses to different types of documents and to the logical time relationships described.

Example

The applicant will complete the form. (**Future tense**)

The applicant completes the form. (**Present tense**)

Complete the form. (**Imperative form, present tense**)

The applicant completed the form. (**Past tense**)

Strong verbs – Use direct, active verbs. Avoid combining weak, vague verbs such as "be" or "do" with the noun form of a verb. Watch out for verbs that end in "-ion" strung together with prepositions (for example, change "creation of the document" to "creating the document").

Examples

Our research could be of help to you in making a decision. (**Weak**)

Our research could help you make a decision. (**Strong**)

We did a calculation of the total. (**Weak**)

We calculated the total. (**Strong**)

Agreement – Make sure that the noun and verb in your sentences agree with each other—that both are singular or both plural.

Example

Power (**noun, singular**) from back-up generators and emergency lighting are (**verb, plural**) routinely maintained as part of the fire plan. (**Incorrect**)

Power (**noun, singular**) from back-up generators and emergency lighting is (**verb, singular**) routinely maintained as part of the fire plan. (**Correct**)

When using an "either/or" sentence format, make sure the verb agrees with the part of the subject closest to the verb.

Example

Either the lock or the barred windows is likely to reduce thefts. (**Incorrect**)

Either the lock or the barred windows are likely to reduce thefts. (**Correct**)

Voice

See *Verbs*.

Want

See *Desire, wish, need, and want*.

Which

See *That and which*.

Who and whom

Use the pronoun "who" as a subject. Use the pronoun "whom" as a direct object, an indirect object, or the object of a preposition.

Example

Who owns this?

To whom does this belong?

Wish

See *Desire, wish, need, and want*.

Your and you're

"Your" is the possessive form of you. "You're" is the contraction of "you are."

Example

This is your coat.

You're in charge today.

APPENDIX 3
Dictionary of Plain English

The following list contains unnecessarily difficult words and phrases, word-wasting idioms, compound prepositions, overly formal phrases, and gender-specific words and phrases, along with their plain English or gender-inclusive alternatives.

Instead of...	Use...
a great deal of	much
a large number of	more
a little less than	almost
a majority of	most
a number of	several, many, some
a period of several weeks	several weeks
a small number of	a few
a sufficient number	enough
accomplish	do
accorded	given
according to the law	legally
accordingly	so
accumulate	gather
acquaint	tell
acquire	get
activate	begin, start
add an additional	add
additional	added
adequate number of	enough
administer	manage, give
admit of	allow
advert	refer
advise	write, tell
affirmative	yes
afford an opportunity	allow, permit
afforded	given
aggregate	total
all of a sudden	suddenly
all of the	all the
allocate	give, divide
along the lines of	like
alternatives	choices
ameliorate	improve
anticipate	expect
apparent	clear
appear	seem
apprise	inform
approximately	about
as a general rule	generally
as a matter of fact	in fact (or omit)
as a means of	to
as of now	now
as to whether	about whether
as to	about
ascertain	find out
assist, assistance	help
at a later date	later
at all times	always
at an early date	soon
at hand	here
at present	now
at regular intervals of time	regularly
at that point in time	then
at the conclusion of	at the end of
at the present time	now
at the rear of	behind
at the time that	when
at this time, at this point in time	now
at which time	then
attains the age of	becomes
attempt (as a verb)	try
based on the fact that	due to/because
beyond a shadow of doubt	no doubt
bottom line	result
bring to a conclusion	conclude
brought to a sudden halt	halted
businessman	businessperson, professional
by means of	by
by reason of	because of
by the time that	when

Instead of...	Use...
by the use of	by
by virtue of	by, under
by way of illustration	for example
calculate	compute
came to a stop	stopped
category	kind, class, group
cause it to be done	have it done
cease	stop
chairman	chair, chairperson
check into	check
cognizance	knowledge
come to an end	end
commence	begin, start
commitment	promise
communicate	write, tell, talk, telephone
compensation	pay
complete (verb)	finish, fill out
comply with	follow
conceal	hide
concerning the matter of	about, concerning
conduct an investigation	investigate
consequence	result
consequently	so
constitute	make up
construct	build
consummate	bring about, complete
contiguous to	next to
contingent upon	if
continue	keep up
contribute	give
cost the sum of	cost
customary practice	practice
deem	consider, think
demonstrate	show
desire	want
despite the fact that	although, even though
detailed information	details
determine	decide
dialogue	discussion, conversation
disclose	show
discontinue	stop
disseminate	send, distribute
does not operate to	does not
donate	give
draw to a close	end
due to the fact that	because, although, even though
during such time as	during, while
during the course of	during
during the period from	from
during the time that	during, while
during which time	while
edifice	building
effect	make
effectuate	bring about, carry out
elect	choose, pick
eliminate	remove, strike out
elucidate	explain
employment	work
encounter	meet
encourage	urge
endeavour (verb)	try
ensuing	following
ensure	follow
enter (on a form)	write
enter into a contract with	contract with
equivalent	equal
evince	show
excessive number of	too many
execute	sign
exhibit a tendency to	tend to
expedite	hasten, hurry, speed up
expend	spend
expiration	end
explicit	plain
facilitate	make easy, help
failed to	did not
feasible	possible
few in number	few
fewer in number	fewer
finalize	end, finish
fireman	fire fighter
for a period of	for
for the duration of	during
for the purpose of	for, to
for the reason that	since, because
foreman	supervisor, lead
formulate	work out, devise, form
forthwith	immediately
forward	send
frequently	often
from the point of view of	for
from time to time	occasionally
give authorization	authorize
handyman	caretaker, repairer
hence	so
hereafter	after this takes effect
herein	here
hereinafter	future, following
heretofore	before this takes effect, until now
hopefully	I hope
hostess	host
housewife	homemaker
I would appreciate it if you would	please
if at all possible	if possible
if that were the case	if so

Instead of...	Use...
implement	carry out
in a position to	can
in a satisfactory manner	satisfactorily
in accordance with	by, under, on
in accordance with	by/under
in addition to	also/besides
in an effort to	to
in as much as	since, because
in back of	behind
in case	if
in close proximity	near, close
in connection with	with, about, concerning
in consideration of the fact	because
indicate	show, tell, say
in excess of	more than
in favour of	for
initiate	begin
in lieu of	instead of, in place of
in light of the fact that	because
in many cases	often
in most cases	usually
in order to	to
in other words	or, that is
in possession of	have
in reference to	about, concerning
in regard to	about, concerning
in relation to	about, concerning
in respect to	about, concerning
in short supply	scarce
in such a manner as to	to
in terms of	in, of
in the absence of	without
in the amount of	of, for
in the course of	during, while
in the event that	should, if, when
in the first place	first
in the instance of	for
in the interest of	for
in the majority of instances	usually, generally
in the matter of	about
in the nature of	like
in the near future	soon
in the neighbourhood of	about
in the possession of	has, have
in the proximity of	about, nearly
in the vicinity of	around, near, close to
in this case	here
in view of the fact	because
indicate	show
inform	tell
initial	first
initiate	begin, start
input	comments, opinion
inquire	ask
inside of	inside
institute	begin, start
insufficient	not enough
interrogate	question
is able to	can
is authorized to	may
is binding upon	binds
is defined as	is
is empowered to	may
is entitled	is called
is unable to	cannot
issue	give
it is apparent that	apparently
it is clear that	clearly
it is directly	will
it is evident that	evidently
it is my intention to	I will
it is obvious that	obviously
it is often the case that	often
it is probable that	probably
it is the duty	will
it shall be lawful	may
it will be necessary	will need to
it would appear that	apparently
keep an eye on	watch
last of all	last
law passed	law enacted
loan (as a verb)	lend
locality	place
locate	find
location	place
mailman	letter carrier
maintenance	upkeep
major portion of	most of
majority of	most
make application to	apply
make contact with	see, meet
make the acquaintance of	meet
man (as a verb)	staff, operate
man/men (as a noun)	humans, people, individuals
man-days/hours	worker-days/hours
mankind	people, humans, humankind
man-made	synthetic, artificial, hand-made
manner	way
manpower	workers, workforce, staff, employees
materialize	appear
maximum	most, largest, longest, greatest
middleman	go-between, facilitator, intermediary
minimum	least, smallest

Instead of...	Use...
modification	change
modify	change
month of July	July
moreover	how, next
necessitate	need
negative	no
negotiate	make
nevertheless	but, however
newsman	reporter, journalist
no later than June 30	before July 1
notwithstanding the fact that	although, even though
objective	aim, goal
obligate	bind
obligation	debt
obtain	get
occasion (as a verb)	cause
of a technical nature	technical
of no mean ability	capable
of the opinion	believe
on a daily basis	daily, every day
on a few occasions	occasionally
on a weekly basis	weekly, every week
on account of	because
on an ongoing basis	continually
on and after July 1	after June 30
on behalf of	for
on his/her own application	at his/her request
on or before June 30	before July 1
on the basis of	by, from, because of
on the grounds that	because
on the part of	by
once in a while	occasionally
ongoing	continuing
optimum	best, greatest, most
or, in the alternative	or
output	product
owing to the fact that	because
parameter	boundary, limit
participate	take part
pending	until
per annum, per day, per foot	a year, a day, a foot
per centum	percent
period of time	period, time
personnel	people, staff
pertaining to	of, about
peruse	read
policeman	police officer
portion	part
possess	have
prepared to offer	can offer, offer
presently	soon
preserve	keep
prior to	before
prior	earlier
prioritize	rank
proceed	go, go ahead, start
procure	buy, obtain, get
prohibited from	may not
promulgate	make, issue
prosecute its business	do business
provided that	if
provision of law	law
purchase (as a verb)	buy
pursuant to	under
range all the way from	range from
receipt of	receive
refer back	refer
regarding	about
reimburse	repay
relative to	about
remainder	rest
remuneration	pay, wages, salary, fee
render	make, give
repairman	repairer, technician
reported to the effect	reported
represents	is
require	need
reside	live
residence	home
respecting	about
retain	keep
revise downward	lower, decrease
said, same, such	the, this, that
salesgirl, saleslady	sales clerk/person/representative
salesman	sales clerk/person/representative
sections 20 to 94 inclusive	sections 20 to 94
seldom if ever	rarely
shall	will
shows a preference for	prefers
since the time that	since
solely	only
specified	named
spokesman	spokesperson
started off with	started with
stewardess	flight attendant
strategize	plan
submit	give, send
subsequent to	after, later
subsequent	next
subsequent(ly)	later
substantial	big, large, great, significant
sufficient number of	enough

Instead of...	Use...
sufficient	enough
summon	send for, call
sustain	suffer, keep going
terminate	end, stop
that is to say	that is
the fact that	(omit)
the foregoing	the, this, that
the fullest possible extent	mostly, completely
the manner in which	how
the only difference being that	except that
the present time	now
the question as to whether	whether, the question
there is no doubt but that	doubtless, no doubt
this is a person who	this person
this is a subject that	this subject
this is a topic that	this topic
this is an (instance, case, situation) which	this (omit)
through the use of	by
thus	so, that way
to be sure	of course
to the extent that	if, when
tradesman	trades person
transmit	send
transpire	happen
under circumstances in which	although, even though
under the provisions of	under
until such time as	until
utilization	use
utilize, employ	use
verbose	wordy
viable	possible
visualize	imagine
voluminous	bulky
waitress	waiter, server
watchman	security guard
weatherman	weather forecaster, meteorologist
with a view to	to
with reference to	for, about, concerning
with regard to	for, about, concerning
with respect to	for, on, about
with the exception of	except
with the object of	to
with the result that	so that
workman	worker

Things You'd Love to Say at Work, But Can't

I don't know what your problem is, but I'll bet it's hard to pronounce.

I see you've set aside this special time to humiliate yourself in public.

I'm really easy to get along with once you people learn to see it my way.

I'll try being nicer if you'll try being smarter.

I'm out of my mind, but feel free to leave a message.

I don't work here. I'm a consultant.

It sounds like English, but I can't understand a word you're saying.

Ahh…I see the screw-up fairy has visited us again.

I like you. You remind me of when I was young and stupid.

You are validating my inherent mistrust of strangers.

I have plenty of talent and vision. I just don't give a damn.

I'm already visualizing the duct tape over your mouth.

I will always cherish the initial misconceptions I had about you.

Thank you. We're all refreshed and challenged by your unique point of view.

The fact that no one understands you doesn't mean you're an artist.

Any connection between your reality and mine is purely coincidental.

What am I? Flypaper for freaks!?

I'm not being rude. You're just insignificant.

It's a thankless job, but I've got a lot of Karma to burn off.

And your crybaby whiny-butt opinion would be…?

Do I look like a people person?

This isn't an office. It's Hell with flourescent lighting.

I started out with nothing and still have most of it left.

About the Author

Duncan Kent has worked as a journalist, technical communicator, documentation consultant, and writing instructor since graduating with a Master of Arts degree from the University of British Columbia in 1976. In 1990, he was awarded the designation of Certified Management Consultant (CMC) by Canada's governing body of management consultants.

Duncan is a founding member of the Canada West Coast chapter of the Society for Technical Communication (STC) and has served as the chapter's President. For more than 12 years he has taught technical writing at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, British Columbia, and is a member of the Advisory Board to the university's Writing and Publishing Program. His writing workshops have been offered in almost every province and territory in Canada, and in-house to more than 50 government and private-sector organizations.

Since 1990, Duncan Kent & Associates Ltd. has provided a full spectrum of technical communication services. With specialists in writing/editing, document production, instructional design, and web site creation, the firm has guided the development of more than 180 manuals, courses, help systems, and web sites.

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